



WITH  
METHUEN'S COLUMN  
ON AN AMBULANCE TRAIN



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THE Author's share of the profits arising from the sale of this book will be given to Lady Lansdowne's Fund for the Widows and Families of Officers.

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ON AN AMBULANCE TRAIN

BY

ERNEST N. BENNETT

FELLOW OF HERTFORD COLLEGE, OXFORD



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## PREFACE.

WHEN I returned from South Africa I had no intention of adding to the war literature which was certain to be evoked by the present campaign. But I now publish this simple narrative because it was suggested to me by a friend that the sale of such a book might perhaps serve to augment in some measure the Fund established by the patriotism and energy of Lady Lansdowne and her Committee. Lady Lansdowne has cordially approved of the suggestion ; so I trust that the profits derived from this little volume may be enough to justify its existence.

ERNEST N. BENNETT.



## WITH METHUEN'S COLUMN ON AN AMBULANCE TRAIN.

THE first view of Capetown from the sea is not easily forgotten. We sailed into the bay just as the sun was rising in splendour behind the cliffs of Table Mountain. The houses of the town which fill the space between the hills and the sea were still more or less in shadow, picked out here and there by twinkling lights. On the summit rested a fleecy cloud which concealed the pointed crags and hung from the edges of the precipice like a border of fine drapery. On the right, groups of buildings stretched onwards to Sea Point, where the surf was breaking on the rocks within a few feet of the road ; on the left were the more picturesque suburbs of Rosebank, Newlands and Claremont nestling amid their woods and orchards ; and still further on lay Wynberg, with its vast hospital, already

become a household word in English homes. The dreary flats of Simon's Bay, where British war-ships lay at anchor, shut in the view.

Pleasing as the picture is when seen from the deck of a Castle Liner, disappointment generally overtakes the voyager who has landed. Capetown itself has little to boast of in the way of architecture. Except Adderley Street, which is adorned by the massive buildings of the Post Office and Standard Bank, the thoroughfares of the town offer scarcely any attractions. The Dutch are not an artistic race, and the fact that natives here live not in "locations" but anywhere they choose has covered some portions of the town's area with ugly and squalid houses. Nor, as a matter of fact, does the general tone of thought and feeling in Cape Colony naturally lend itself to æsthetic considerations. Even the churches fail to escape the influence of a spirit which subordinates everything else to practical and utilitarian considerations. Can two uglier buildings of their kind be found in the civilised world than the English and Dutch cathedrals at Capetown?

Another unpleasant feature of life in Capetown is the misfortune, not the fault, of the inhabitants in being frequently exposed to the full fury of the south-east wind. Sometimes for whole days together the Cape is swept by tremendous blasts, which tear up the sea into white foam and raise clouds of blinding dust along the streets of the town.

Nevertheless the kindness and generosity of the people are not in any way lessened by these unpleasant features in their surroundings. The warmth of colonial hospitality is acknowledged by all travellers, and may be partly due to that love of the mother country which survives in the hearts of Englishmen who have never left South Africa, and yet recognise in the visitor a kind of tie, as it were, between themselves and old England. Such hospitality blesses him that gives as well as him that takes, and the host listens with deepest interest to his guest's chatter about London, or perhaps the country town or village where he or his forefathers lived in days gone by. Any one who is accustomed in England to the conventional

“Saturday to Monday” or the “shooting week” in a country house opens his eyes with wonder when he receives a warm invitation from a colonial to spend a month with him at his house on the Karroo. And such invitations, unlike those which the Oriental traveller receives, are uttered in earnest and meant to be accepted.

Capetown is by far the most cosmopolitan of all our colonial capitals. Englishmen, Dutchmen, Jews, Kaffirs, “Cape boys” and Malays bustle about the streets conversing in five or six different languages. There is a delightful freedom from conventionalism in the matter of dress. At one moment you meet a man in a black or white silk hat, at another a grinning Kaffir bears down upon you with the costume of a scarecrow ; you next pass a couple of dignified Malays with long silken robes and the inevitable *tarbush*, volubly chattering in Dutch or even Arabic. These Malays form a particularly interesting section of the population. They are largely the descendants of Oriental slaves owned by the Dutch, and, of course, preserve

their Moslem faith, though some of its external observances, *e.g.*, the veiling of women, have ceased to be observed. I did my best during a few days' stay at Somerset West to witness one of their great festivals called "El Khalifa". At this feast some devotees cut themselves with knives until the blood pours from the wounds, and a friend of mine who had witnessed the performance on one occasion seemed to think that in some cases the wounding and bleeding were not really objective facts, but represented to the audience by a species of hypnotic suggestion. As, however, my visit to Somerset West took place during the month of Ramazan there was no opportunity of witnessing the "Khalifa," which would be celebrated during Bairam, the month of rejoicing which amongst Moslems all the world over succeeds the self-mortifications of Ramazan. Even if their external observances of the usages of Islam seem somewhat lax, the Cape Moslems, I found, faithfully observe the month of abstinence, and I remember talking to a most intelligent Malay boy, who was working hard as a mason in the full glare of the

midday heat, and was touching neither food nor drink from sunrise to sunset.

All around were signs and tokens of the war. Large transports lay gently rolling upon the swell in every direction, and it was said that not less than sixty ships were lying at anchor together in the bay. H.M.S. *Niobe* and *Doris* faced the town, and further off was stationed the *Penelope*, which had already received its earlier contingents of Boer prisoners. It is very difficult, by the way, to understand how some of these captives contrived later on to escape by swimming to the shore, for, apart from the question of sharks, the distance to the beach was considerable.

On land the whole aspect of the streets was changed. Every few yards one met men in khaki and putties. This cloth looks fairly smart when it is new and the buttons and badges are burnished; but, after a very few weeks at the front, khaki uniforms become as shabby as possible. No one who is going into the firing line has any wish to draw the enemy's fire by the glint of his buttons or his shoulder-badges, and



so these are either removed or left to tarnish. Nor does khaki—at any rate the “drill” variety—improve its beauty by being washed. When one has bargained with a Kaffir lady to wash one’s suit for ninepence it comes back with all the glory of its russet brown departed and a sort of limp, anæmic look about it. And when the wearer has lain upon the veldt at full length for long hours together in rain and sun and dust-storm his kit assumes an inexpressible doddiness, and preserves only its one superlative merit of so far resembling mother earth that even the keen eyes behind the Mauser barrels fail to spot Mr. Atkins as he lies prone behind his stone or anthill.

As our lumbering cab drove up Adderley Street to the hotel a squadron of the newly raised South African Light Horse rode past. The men looked very jaunty and well set up with their neat uniforms, bandoliers and “smasher” hats with black cocks’ feathers. There has never been the slightest difficulty in raising these irregular bodies of mounted infantry. The doors of their office in Atkinson’s Buildings were besieged by

a crowd of applicants—very many of them young men who had arrived from England for the purpose of joining. A certain amount of perfectly good-humoured banter was levelled against these brand-new soldiers by their friends, and some fun poked at them about their riding. Occasionally, for instance, a few troopers were unhorsed during parade and the riderless steeds trotted along the public road at Rosebank. But certainly the tests of horsemanship were severe. Many of the horses supplied by Government were very wild and sometimes behaved like professional buckjumpers ; and it is no easy task to control the eccentric and unexpected gyrations of such a beast when the rider is encumbered with the management of a heavy Lee-Metford rifle. Since the day on which I first saw the squadron in question it has passed through its baptism of fire at Colenso. The Light Horse advanced on the right of Colonel Long's ill-fated batteries, and was cruelly cut up by a murderous fire from Hlangwane Hill.

Capetown is not well furnished with places of amusement. There is, it is true, a roomy theatre,

whose manager, Mr. de Jong, sent an invitation to the staff of the "Pink 'Un" to dine with him and his friends at Pretoria on New Year's Day! How the Boers must have laughed when they read of this cordial invitation! During the few days which elapsed before our ambulance train started for the front we paid a visit to the theatre, but we found the stage tenanted by a "Lilliputian Company," and it is always tiresome and distressing to watch precocious children of twelve aping their elders. One feels all the time that the whole performance scarcely rises above an exhibition of highly-trained cats or monkeys, and that the poor mites ought all to be in bed long ago. Nevertheless, this dreary theatre was, in default of anything better, visited again and again by British officers and others. A friend of mine in the Guards told me with a sigh that he had actually watched the performances of these accomplished infants for no less than seven nights.

There are several music halls in Capetown. I have visited similar entertainments in Constantinople, Cairo, Beyrout and other towns of

the East, but I never saw anything to match some of these Capetown haunts for out-and-out vulgarity. There was, it is true, a general air of "patriotism" pervading them—but it was frequently the sort of patriotism which consists in getting drunk and singing "Soldiers of the Queen". On one occasion I remember a curious and typical incident at one of these music halls. Standing among a crowd of drunken and half-drunken men was a quiet and respectable-looking man drinking his glass of beer from the counter. One of the *habitués* of the place suddenly addressed him, and demanded with an oath whether he had ever heard so good a song as the low ditty which had just been screamed out by a painted woman on the stage. The stranger remarked quietly that it "wasn't a bad song, but he had certainly heard better ones," when the bully in front without any warning struck him a violent blow in the face, felling him to the ground. A comrade of mine, a Welshman, who was standing near the victim, protested against such cowardly behaviour, and was immediately set upon by some dozen of the audience, who

savagely knocked him down and then drove him into the street with kicks and blows. These valiant individuals then returned and were soon busy with a hiccuping chorus of "Rule, Britannia". How forcibly the whole scene recalled Dr. Johnson's words: "Patriotism, sir, is the last resort of a scoundrel".

The Uitlander refugees were numerous in Capetown, and the principal hotels were full of them. Those whom I happened to meet did not seem at all overwhelmed by their recent oppression, and some of them contrived out of their shattered fortunes to drink champagne for dinner at a guinea a bottle. I do not think that the average Johannesburg Uitlander impresses the Englishman very favourably. Mining camps are not the best nurseries for good breeding or nobility of character, and one could not help feeling sorry that gallant Englishmen were dying by hundreds while some of these German Jews wallowed in security and luxury. Quite recently an officer overheard a "Jew-boy" loudly declaring in a shop that "after all, British soldiers were paid to go out and get shot," etc., and

in a fit of righteous indignation the Englishman seized the Semite and threw him out of the door.

English visitors to the Cape who, like myself, wished to contribute our humble share towards the work of the campaign had several directions in which to utilise their energies. The Prince Alfred's Field Artillery was raising recruits, and on the point of leaving for the front for the defence of De Aar. The Duke of Edinburgh's Rifle Volunteers enlisted men on Thursday, drilled them day and night, and sent them off on the Tuesday. This fine corps has, much to its vexation, been almost continuously employed in guarding lines of communication and protecting bridges and culverts from any violence at the hands of colonial rebels. The South African Light Horse has already been mentioned. For those of us who found it impossible to pledge ourselves for the whole period of the war, owing to duties at home which could not be left indefinitely, and who possessed some knowledge of ambulance work, an excellent opening was found in one of the ambulance corps originated by the

Red Cross Society under Colonel Young's able and energetic management.

Having volunteered for service on one of the ambulance trains and been accepted, I set off with a corporal to Woodstock Hospital to secure my uniform and kit. The quartermaster who supplied me was justly annoyed because some mistake had been made about the hour for my appearance, and when he rather savagely demanded what sized boots I wore, I couldn't for the life of me remember and blurted out "nines," whereas my normal "wear" is "sevens". Instantly a pair of enormous boots and a correspondingly colossal pair of shoes were hurled at me, while, from various large pigeon-holes in a rack, bootlaces, socks, putties and other things were rained upon me. I couldn't help laughing as I picked them up. Here I was equipped from head to foot with two uniform suits of khaki—which mercifully fitted well—shirts, boots, shoes, helmet, field-service cap and other minutiae, and the entire equipment occupied some four minutes all told. What a contrast to the considerable periods of time often consumed at

home over the colour of a tie or the shape of a collar!

Shouldering the waterproof kit-bag containing my brand-new garments, and saluting the irritated officer, I marched off to ambulance train No. 2, where I speedily exchanged my civilian habiliments for her Majesty's uniform. The "fall" of my nether garments was not perfect, but on the whole I was rather pleased with the fit of the khaki, relieved on the arm with a red Geneva Cross.

One of the two ambulance trains on the western side is manned entirely by regulars, the other (No. 2) is in charge of an R.A.M.C. officer, but the staff under him is composed almost wholly of volunteers. This staff consists of a civilian doctor from a London hospital attached to the South African Field Force, two Red Cross nurses from England, a staff sergeant, two corporals, a couple of cooks and ten "orderlies" in charge of the five wards.

Introductions to my comrades followed. We were certainly one of the oddest collection of human beings I have ever come across. Our



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pursuits when not in active service were extremely varied—one of our number was an accountant, another a chemist, a third brewed beer in Johannesburg, a fourth was an ex-baker, and so on. We were, on the whole, a very harmonious little society, and it was with real regret that I left my comrades when I returned to England. At least four of our number were refugees from Johannesburg, and very anxious to return. These unfortunates retailed at intervals doleful news about well-furnished houses being rifled, Boer children smashing up porcelain ornaments and playfully cutting out the figures from costly paintings with a pair of scissors, and grand pianos being annexed to adorn the cottages of Kaffir labourers. Another member of our little society had a very fair voice and good knowledge of music, for in the days of his boyhood he had sung in the choir of a Welsh cathedral ; since that time he had practised as a medical man and driven a tramcar. The weather was very trying sometimes and J——, our Welsh singer, had acquired an almost supernatural skill in leaping from the train when it stopped for a couple of minutes,

securing a bottle of Bass and then boarding the guard's van when the train was moving off. On one of these successful forays I saw J—— send three respectable people sprawling on their backs as he violently collided with them in his desperate efforts to overtake the receding train. The victims slowly got up and some nasty remarks about J—— were wafted to us over the veldt. We had a couple of cooks. One of them was an American who had served in the Cuban war, the other a big Irishman called Ben. The American *chef*, being the only man out of uniform on the train, had access to alcoholic refreshments at the stations, which were very properly denied to the troops, and he rejoiced exceedingly to exercise his privilege. He could sleep in almost any position, and generally lay down on the kitchen dresser without any form of pillow, or slept serenely in a sitting posture with his feet elevated far above his head.

We steamed away from the Capetown station in the afternoon. The regular service had to a large extent been suspended, and here and there sentries with fixed bayonets kept watch over the

government trains as they lay on the sidings. If it was thought prudent to guard trains from any injury in Capetown itself, one can realise the absolute necessity of employing the colonial volunteers in patrolling the long line of some 600 miles from the sea to Modder River.

"Queen Victoria's afternoon tea"—as we called it—was served about five. The two orderlies for the day brought from the kitchen a huge tea-urn, some dozen bowls, and two large loaves. We supplemented this rudimentary fare with a pot of "Cape gooseberry" jam, the gift of a generous donor, and improved the quality of the tea with a little condensed milk. Fresh from the usages of a more effete civilisation I did not feel after two cups of tea and some butterless bread that "satisfaction of a felt want"—to quote Aristotle—which comes, say, after a dinner with the Drapers' Company in London, and for two nights I tore open and devoured with my ward-companion a tin of salmon which I bought from a Jew along the line. But, strange to say, after a few days of this *régime*, which in its chronological sequence of meals and its strange simplicity

recalled the memories of early childhood, my internal economy seemed to have adapted itself to the changed environment, and after five o'clock with its tea and bread I no longer wished for more food. Exactly the same experience befalls those inexperienced travellers in tropical countries who, at first, are continually imbibing draughts of water, but soon learn the useful lesson of drinking at meal-time only, and before long do not even take the trouble to carry water-bottles with them at all.

Our destination was supposed to be De Aar, but nobody ever knew exactly where we were going or what we were going to do when we got there. During a campaign orders filter through various official channels, and frequently by the time they have reached the officer in charge of a train others of a contradictory purport are racing after them over the wires. This sort of thing is absolutely unavoidable. Between the army at the front and the great base at Capetown stretched some 700 miles of railway, and over this single line of rails ran an unending succession of trains carrying troops, food, guns,

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and last, but by no means least, tons upon tons of ammunition. The work of supplying a modern army in the field is stupendous, and the best thanks of the nation are due to the devoted labours of the Army Service Corps. The officers and men of the A.S.C. work night and day, they rarely see any fighting, and are seldom mentioned in the public press or in despatches; yet how much depends upon their zeal and devotion! Amateur critics at home have frequently asked why such and such a general has not left strong positions on the flank and advanced into the enemy's country further afield. Quite apart from the fearful danger of exposing our lines of communication to attack from a strong force of the enemy, these critics do not seem to possess the most elementary idea of what is involved in the advance of an army. How do they suppose hundreds of heavily laden transport waggons are to be dragged across the uneven veldt, intersected every now and then by rugged "kopjes" and "spruits" and "dongas"? Ammunition alone is a serious item to be considered. Lyddite shells, *e.g.*, are packed two in a case: each case weighs

100 lb., and I have frequently seen a waggon loaded with, say, a ton of these shells, and drawn by eight mules, stuck fast for a time in the open veldt ; the passers-by have run up and shoved at the wheels and so at last the lumbering cart has jogged slowly on. This load would probably in action disappear in half an hour ; and when one reflects that in one of our recent engagements each battery fired off 200 shells, it is easy to understand the enormous weight of metal which has to follow an army in order to make the artillery efficient, and to realise how unwilling a general is to leave a railway behind him, and attempt to move his transport across the uncertain and devious tracks of an unmapped African veldt. Lord Kitchener's successful march upon Omdurman was only rendered possible by the fact that the army kept continuously to the railway and the Nile.

The railway journey northwards is full of interest. Between Capetown and Worcester the country is well watered and fields of yellow corn continually meet the eye, interspersed with vines and mealies. Yet here and there that lack of

enterprise which seems to characterise the Dutch farmer is easily noticeable. Irrigation is sadly neglected and hundreds of acres which with a little care and outlay would grow excellent crops are still unproductive.

Soon after leaving Worcester the line rises by steep gradients nearly 2,500 feet. Right in front the Hex River Mountains extend like a vast barrier across the line and seem to defy the approaching train. But engineering skill has here contrived to surmount all the obstacles set up by Nature. The train goes waltzing round the most striking curves, some of them almost elliptical. Tremendous gradients lead through tunnels and over bridges, and the swerving carriages run often in alarming proximity to the edge of precipitous ravines. What a splendid position for defensive purposes ! Had the present war been declared three weeks earlier De Aar would have been quite unable to stand against the Boers, and thus the enemy might with his amazing mobility have made a swift descent along the railway and occupied the Hex River pass. Out of this position not all the Queen's

horses and all the Queen's men would have dislodged him without enormous loss. With the armed support of all the Dutch farmers from Worcester to the Orange River, a Boer occupation of this strong position would have been a terrible menace to Capetown itself. As it is, shots are occasionally fired at trains as they run northward from Worcester, and as a few pounds of dynamite would wreck portions of the Hex River line for weeks the government patrols in this locality cannot be too careful.

Our first passage through the Karroo was by night, but during the busy days of service which followed we frequently saw this dreary expanse of desert in daylight. Some mysterious charm, hidden from the eyes of the unsympathetic tourist, dwells in the Karroo. The country folk who inhabit these vast plains all agree that to live in them is to love them. Children speak of the kopjes as if they were living playmates, and farmers grow so deeply attached to their waggons and ox teams that Sir Owen Lanyon's forcible seizure of one in distraint for taxes appeared a kind of sacrilege in the eyes of the Boers.



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At times nothing can be more unlovely than the stony, barren wilderness of the Karroo. The Sudan desert with its rocky hills and the broad Nile between the yellow banks is infinitely more picturesque than this vast South African plain. Still, at certain periods of the day and year the Karroo becomes less forbidding to the view. Sometimes after heavy rain the whole country is covered with a bright green carpet, but in summer, and, indeed, most of the year, the short scrub which here takes the place of grass is sombre in tint. Nevertheless cattle devour these apparently withered shrubs with avidity and thrive upon them. Again, when the warm tints of the setting sun flood the whole expanse of desert, there is a short-lived beauty in the rugged kopjes with all their fantastic outlines sharply silhouetted against the glowing sky. The farms on the Karroo, and, in fact, generally throughout the more northern parts of the colony, are of surprising size. It is quite common to find a Dutchman farming some 10,000 acres. Arable land in the Karroo is of course very rare, and one would think that the "Ooms" and the

"Tantas" and their young hopefuls would have their time fully occupied even in keeping their large herds and flocks within bounds. One continually sees half a dozen ostriches stalking solemnly about a huge piece of the veldt, with no farm-house anywhere in sight, and it is difficult to understand how these people contrive to catch their animals.

At the lower extremity of the vast Nieuweveld range which shuts in the Karroo on the west lies the little township of Matjesfontein, a veritable oasis in the desert. Here lies the body of the gallant Wauchope who perished in the disastrous attack on the Magersfontein trenches. The whole line north of this point was patrolled by colonial volunteers, amongst whom I noticed especially the Duke of Edinburgh's Rifles, with gay ribbons round their "smasher" hats. Nothing could be less exciting or interesting than their monotonous routine of work. We continually came across a little band of, say, twenty or thirty men and a couple of officers stationed near some culvert or bridge. Their tents were pitched on a bit of stony ground, with not a trace of vegeta-

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tion near it, and here they stayed for months together, half dead from the boredom of their existence. Nevertheless such work was quite essential to the success of the campaign, for the attitude of the Dutch colonists up-country has been throughout the war an uncertain factor, and if these long lines of communication had been left unprotected it is more than likely that our "Tommies'" supplies would not have arrived at the front with unfailing regularity. As it was, shots were occasionally fired at the trains, and at one spot we passed a curious incident occurred in this connection. A patrol suddenly came across a colonist who had climbed up a telegraph post and was busily engaged in cutting the wires. "Crack" went a Lee-Metford and the rebel, shot like a sitting bird, dropped from his perch to the ground. On another occasion we heard a dull explosion not unlike the boom of a heavy gun, and found a little later that a culvert had been blown up a few miles ahead of us not far from Graspan. In short, I do not think that the British public fully realised the danger threatened by any serious and extensive revolt of the Dutch colonists. Had

the farmers in that vast triangle bounded by the railway, the coast and the Orange River thrown off their allegiance, it would have taken many more than 15,000 colonial volunteers to prevent their mobile commandos from swooping down here and there along this long line of railway, and utterly destroying our western line of communication as well as menacing Lord Methuen's forces in the rear. Whatever may be said or thought of some of Mr. Schreiner's actions, it is held, and justly held, by level-headed people of both parties at the Cape, that the continuance in office of the Dutch ministry has contributed more than anything else to preserve the colony from the peril of an internal rebellion. For this we cannot be too thankful!

Signs of animal life in the Karroo are few and far between. There are scarcely any flowers to attract butterflies, and I never saw more than four or five species of birds. There was one handsome bird, however, as big as a crow, with black and white plumage—probably the small bustard (*Eupodotis afroides*)—which occasionally rose from among the scrub and after a brief

flight sank vertically to the ground in a curious fashion. Sometimes too, at nightfall, a large bird would fly with a strong harsh note across the stony veldt to the kopjes in the distance. Of the larger fauna I saw only the springbok. A small herd of these graceful little creatures were one evening running about the veldt within 500 yards of the train. On another occasion too, very early in the morning, one of our two Red Cross nurses was startled by the sudden appearance of a large baboon which crept down a gully near Matjesfontein—the only one we ever saw.

Between Matjesfontein and the great camp of De Aar there is little to interest or amuse the traveller. The only town which is at all worthy of the name is Beaufort West, nestling amid its trees, a bright patch of colour amid the neutral tints of the hills and surrounding country. Here reside many patients suffering from phthisis, for the air is dry and warm and the rainfall phenomenally small. But after all what a place to die in! Rather a shorter and sweeter life in dear England than a cycle of Beaufort West!

As we steamed into De Aar the sun had set, and all the ways were darkened, so, after a vain attempt to take a walk about the camp after the regulation hour, 9 P.M.—an effort which was checked by the praiseworthy<sup>\*</sup> zeal of the Australian military police—we returned to the train. Here I was greeted to my amazement by the notes of an anthem, “I will lay me down in peace,” sung very well by our Welsh ex-choir-boy and two other members of the corps, who nevertheless did not lay them down in peace or otherwise till the small hours of the morning.

Next day we rose early, but found that we should have to spend five or six days at De Aar. This news was not at all pleasant. I have been in many dreary and uninteresting spots in the world, *e.g.*, Aden or Atbara Camp, but I have never disliked a place as much as I did De Aar. The whole plain has been cut up by the incessant movement of guns, transport waggons and troops, and the result is that one is nearly choked and blinded by the dense clouds of dust. Huge spiral columns of sand tear across the plain over the tops of the kopjes, carrying with them scraps of

paper and rubbish of all sorts. The irritation produced by the absorption of this permeating dust into the system militates to some extent against the rapid recovery of men who suffer from diseases like dysentery or enteric fever. It travels under doors and through window sashes, and a patient is obliged, whether he will or no, to swallow a certain amount of it daily. Nevertheless the South African dust does not appear to be so bacillus-laden as, *e.g.*, that of Atbara Camp, which, amongst other evil effects, continually produced ulceration in the mouth and throat.

De Aar lies in the centre of a large plain, shut in on every side by kopjes. In fact its position is very similar indeed to that of Ladysmith. The hills on the east and west were always held by pickets with some field guns belonging to the Royal Artillery and the Prince Alfred's Artillery Volunteers. A much loftier line of kopjes to the north was untenanted by the British, but any approach over the veldt from the north-east was blocked by several rows of shelter trenches and a strongly-constructed redoubt with wire

entanglements, ditch, and parapet topped with iron rails. Signallers were continually at work, and at night it was quite a pretty sight to watch the twinkling points of the signal lights as they flashed between the tents on the plain and the distant pickets on the tops of the kopjes. Boers had been seen to the east and on the west ; some at least of the Dutch colonists were in open revolt ; so officers and men were always prepared at a moment's notice to line the trenches for defence, while the redoubts and the batteries on the hills were permanently garrisoned.

Everybody loathed De Aar. With the exception of some feeble cricket played on some unoccupied patches of dusty ground, and a couple of shabby tennis courts, usually reserved for the "patball" of the local athletes of either sex, there was absolutely nothing to do, and we were too far off Modder River to feel that we were at all in the swim of things. The heat was sometimes appalling. On Christmas day the temperature was 105° in the shade, and most people took a long siesta after the midday dinner and read such odds and ends of literature as fell into their hands.



We train people, of course, read and slumbered in one of the wards, while our comrades under canvas lay with eight heads meeting in the centre of a tent and sixteen legs projecting from it like the spokes of a wheel. Mercifully enough scorpions were few and far between at De Aar, so one could feel fairly secure from these pests. How different it was in the Sudan campaign, especially at some camps like Um Teref, where batches of soldiers black and white came to be treated for scorpion stings, which in one case were fatal. *A propos* of reading we were wonderfully well provided with all manner of literature by the kindly forethought of good people in England. The assortment was very curious indeed. One would see lying side by side *The Nineteenth Century*, *Ally Sloper's Half Holiday*, and the *Christian World*. This literary syncretism was especially marked in the mission tent at De Aar, where the forms were besprinkled with an infinite variety of magazines and pamphlets—to such an extent indeed that in some cases the more vivid pages of a *Family Herald* would temporarily seduce the soldier's

mind from the calmer pleasures of Mr. Moody's hymn book, and those who came to pray remained to read.

In the evening about 5 o'clock, when the rays of the setting sun were less vertical and the cool of the evening was not yet merged in the chill of the night, we sallied out for a stroll. Everybody walked to and fro and interchanged war news—such as we had!—and mutual condolences about the miseries of our forced inaction at De Aar. Canteens were opened in the various sections of the camp, and long columns of "Tommies" stood with mess-tins, three abreast, waiting their turn to be served, for all the world like the crowd at the early door of a London theatre. The natural irritability arising from residence in De Aar, added to the sultry heat and one's comparative distance from the canteen counter, frequently caused quarrels and personal assaults in the swaying column. But those who lost their temper generally lost their places too, and the less excitable candidates for liquor closed up their ranks and left the combatants to settle their differences outside. Non-commissioned

officers enjoyed the privilege of entering a side door in the canteen for their beer, and thus avoided the crush: and one of my comrades cleverly but unscrupulously secured a couple of stripes somehow or other and, masquerading as a corporal, entered the coveted side door, and brought away his liquor in triumph.

Apart from these liquid comforts, which were, very properly, restricted in quantity, those of us who possessed any ready money could purchase sundry provisions at two stores in De Aar. The volunteers were paid at the rate of 5s. a day, which seems a very high rate of pay when one remembers that the British soldier, who ran much greater risk and did more actual fighting, received less than 1s. Of course there were volunteers here and there like myself who possessed some means of our own and so thought it right and proper to return our pay to the Widows' and Orphans' Fund, but nevertheless I fail to see why we should be paid at this exorbitant rate. The most glaring instances of overpaid troops were the Rimington Scouts, who actually received 10s. a day and their rations.

One trembles to think of the bill we shall all have to pay at the close of the campaign!

The articles most in request at De Aar were things like "Rose's lime juice cordial," Transvaal tobacco, cigarettes, jam, tinned salmon, sardines, etc. Now it happened that the entire retail trade of the place was in the hands of two Jewish merchants. The more fashionable of the two shops took advantage of our necessities and demanded most exorbitant prices for its goods. "Lime juice cordial," *e.g.*, which could be got for 1s. 6d. or 1s. 3d. in Capetown, was sold for 2s. 6d. and 3s. at De Aar, and the other charges were correspondingly high. Nemesis, however, overtook the shopman, for the camp commandant hearing of his evil deeds placed a sentry in front of the store and so put it out of bounds. He held out for a couple of days, while his more reasonable if less pretentious rival flourished exceedingly, but a daily loss of £200 is too severe a tax on the pertinacity of a Jew, or indeed of anybody, so the rival tariffs were arranged on similar lines, and the sentry sloped his rifle and walked off,

The mission workers at De Aar—some excellent people—dwelt in two railway carriages on a siding. There were, I think, two ladies and a gentleman. They worked exceedingly hard and their mission tent was generally well filled. It is astonishing what keenness is evoked by evangelical services with “gospel hymns”. We all sang a hymn like “I *do* believe, I *will* believe,” with an emphasis which seemed to imply that the effort was considerable, but that nobody, not even a Boer commando, could alter our conviction. Many of the hymns—poor doggerel from a literary point of view—were sung to pleasing tunes wonderfully well harmonised by the men’s voices. Then there was a brief address by a young man with a serious and kindly face, and this was succeeded by a series of ejaculatory prayers taken up here and there by the men. It was a strange and impressive spectacle to see a soldier rise to his feet, his beard rough and unkempt, his khaki uniform all soiled and bedraggled, and forthwith proceed to utter a long prayer. Such prayers were largely composed of supplications on behalf of wives and families

at home, and one forgot the bad grammar, the rough accent and the monotonous repetition in one's sympathy for these honest fellows who were not ashamed to pray.

Would we Churchmen had more enthusiasm and courage in our teaching and our methods! This was the quality that enabled the infant church to emerge from its obscure dwelling in a Syrian town and spread all the world over. It is this warmth of conviction which lent fortitude to the martyrs of old time, and at this moment breathes valour into our brave enemies. But where is such vital enthusiasm to be found in the Church of England? In one of our cathedrals we read the epitaph of a certain ecclesiastic: "He was noticeable for many virtues, and sternly repressed all forms of religious enthusiasm". History repeats itself, and for manly outspokening on great questions of social and political importance the laity are learning to look elsewhere than to the pulpit. Oh! for one day in our National Church of Paul and Athanasius and Luther, men who spoke what they felt, unchecked by thoughts

about promotion and popularity and respectability. Enthusiastic independence is as unpopular in religion as it is in politics; and the fight against prejudice and unfairness is often exceeding bitter to the man who dares to run his tilt against the opinion of the many. The struggle sometimes robs life of much that renders it sweet; nevertheless it may help to make history and will bring a man peace at the last, for he will have done what he could to leave the world a little better than he found it.

These good mission-folk looked after our physical as well as our spiritual necessities. They had annexed a small house and garden just opposite their tent, and here we could buy an excellent cup of tea or lemonade for one penny, as well as a variety of delectable buns, much in request. So pressing was the demand for these light and cheap refreshments that the supply of cups and glasses gave out, and the lemonade was usually served out in old salmon or jam tins. Very often, after a couple of hymns and, perhaps, a prayer, we went across and finished up the evening with a couple of

buns and a cup of tea. One of my ambulance comrades, an ex-baker from Johannesburg, was extremely good in helping on the success of the refreshment bar, and frequently stood for hours together at the receipt of custom. The returns were very large. One day, I remember, they amounted to £22 in pennies : this would mean, I think, on a low estimate, that something like 1,500 soldiers used the temperance canteen on that evening. Apart from this enterprising work, private gifts in the way of fruit occasionally arrived on the scene, and I well remember one day when almost every "Tommy" one met carried a pine apple in his hands. In addition to such pleasures of realised satisfaction we enjoyed the pleasures of anticipation ; for was not her Gracious Majesty's chocolate *en route* for South Africa ? The amount of interest exhibited in the arrival of these chocolate boxes was amazing. Men continually discussed them, and a stranger would have thought that chocolate was some essential factor in a soldier's life, from which we had, by the exigencies of camp life, been long deprived ! As a matter of fact, port-



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able forms of cocoa are extremely valuable in cases where normal supplies of food are cut off. Every soldier on a campaign carries in his haversack a small tin labelled "emergency rations". This cannot be opened unless by order from a commanding officer and any infraction of the rule is severely punished. At one end of the oblong tin are "beef rations," at the other "chocolate rations," enough to sustain a man amid hard and exhausting work for thirty-six hours. The chocolate rations consist of three cubes and can be eaten in the dry state; once, however, I came across a spare emergency tin, and found that with boiling water a single cube made enough liquid chocolate for ten men, a cup each. People make a great fuss in England if they don't get three or four meals a day, but a healthy man can easily fight with much less nourishment than this. I have seen Turkish troops during the Cretan insurrection live on practically nothing else than a few beans and a little bread, and on this meagre and precarious diet they fought like heroes. In the Sudan a few bunches of raisins will keep one going all

day. At the same time, these things are to some extent relative to the individual. I have known huge athletic men curl up in no time because they couldn't get three meals a day on a campaign, whereas others, of half their build and muscle, may bear privations infinitely better. It is annoying to find here and there in the newspapers querulous letters from men at the front complaining that plum puddings and sweetmeats haven't reached them, and that their Christmas fare was only a bit of bully beef and a pint of beer. These men don't represent the rank and file of the army a bit. The English soldier is better fed and clothed and looked after than any other fighting man in the world, except possibly the American, and the manly soldier is not in the habit of whining after the fashion of these letters because he doesn't get quite as good a dinner on the veldt as he does in the dépôt at home.

The military authorities at De Aar exercised the utmost stringency in refusing permission to unauthorised civilians to stay in the camp or pass through it. These regulations were absolutely

necessary. The country round De Aar was full of Dutchmen, who were, with scarcely an exception, thoroughly in sympathy with the enemy, and throughout the campaign, at Modder River, Stormberg, the Tugela, and even inside Ladysmith and Mafeking spies have been repeatedly captured and shot. Some of the attempts by civilians to get through De Aar without adequate authorisation were quite amusing. I remember a particularly nice Swedish officer arriving one night, equipped after the most approved fashion of military accoutrements—Stohwasser leggings, spurs, gloves, etc., but his papers were not sufficient for his purpose, and charm he never so wisely, the camp commandant politely but firmly compelled him to return to Richmond Road, which lay just outside the pale of military law. Another gentleman, well known in England, failed in his first effort to penetrate the camp on his way northwards, but succeeded finally in reaching De Aar by going up as an officer's servant!

The run from De Aar to Belmont is about 100 miles. The ambulance train arrived there on

the evening of the battle, and the staff on board found plenty of work ready for them. The wounded men were all placed together in a large goods' shed at the station. They lay as they were taken from the field by the stretcher-bearers. Lint and bandages had been applied, but, of course, uniforms, bodies and even the floor were saturated with blood. Such spectacles are not pleasing, but nobody ever thinks about the un-æsthetic side of the picture when busily engaged in helping the wounded. "The gentleman in khaki," poor fellow, has often precious little khaki left on him by the time he reaches the base hospital. When the femoral artery is shot through one does not waste time by thinking of the integrity of a pair of trousers—a few rips of the knife and away goes a yard or two of khaki. If the cases had not been so sad we should often have laughed at the extraordinary appearance of some of the men. One soldier, for example, was brought into our train with absolutely nothing on him except one sleeve, which he seemed to treasure for the sake of comparative respectability! Wounded men frequently lose so much blood

before they are found that their clothes become quite stiff, and the best thing to do is to cut the whole uniform off them and wrap them in blankets.

Perhaps it is worth while writing a few words about the general method pursued in the collection and treatment of our wounded men. In a frontal attack upon a position held in force by the enemy, our men advance in "quarter column," or other close formation, till they get within range of the enemy's fire. They then "extend," *i.e.*, every man takes up his position a few paces away from his neighbour, and in all probability lies or stoops down behind whatever he can find, at the same time keeping up an incessant rifle-fire on the enemy. Far behind him, and usually on his right or left, the artillerymen are hard at work sending shell after shell upon the trenches in front. Every now and then the infantrymen run or crawl forward fifty or sixty yards, and thus gradually forge ahead till within two hundred yards of the enemy, when with loud cheers and fixed bayonets they leap up and rush forward to finish off the fight with cold steel.

Even from this skeleton outline it is easy to see that the wounded in a battle like Belmont and Graspán are all over the place, though the motionless forms grow more numerous the nearer we get to the enemy's lines. Now, strictly speaking, stretcher-bearers ought not to move forward to the aid of the wounded *during the battle*. The proper period for this work is two hours after the cessation of hostilities. But in almost every engagement of the present campaign our stretcher-bearers with their officers have gallantly advanced during the progress of the fighting and attended to the wounded under fire. Such plucky conduct as this merits the warmest praise. In the non-combatant, who has none of the excitement bred of actual fighting to sustain him, it requires a high decree of courage to kneel or stoop when every one else is lying down, and in this exposed position first to find the tiny bullet puncture, and then bandage the wound satisfactorily. Many and many a life has been saved by this conduct on the part of our medical staff, for if an important artery is severed by a bullet or shell-splinter a man may easily bleed to death in ten minutes.

I have myself on one occasion in Crete seen jets of blood escaping from the femoral artery of a Turkish soldier, without being able to render him any assistance. In short, it is believed that quite three-fifths of those who perish on a battlefield die from loss of blood. In some cases a soldier may, by digital pressure or by improvising a rough tourniquet, check the flow of blood from a wound, but the nervous prostration which accompanies a wound inflicted by a bullet travelling nearly 2,000 feet a second is so great, that most men seriously wounded are physically incapable of rendering such assistance to themselves, even if they understand the elementary amount of anatomy requisite for the treatment.

At the same time it is only fair to point out that stretcher-bearers who advance during an engagement and render this gallant assistance to the wounded do so entirely at their own risk and must take their chance of getting hit. Complaints have been from time to time made, by persons who did not know the circumstances, that our stretcher-bearers have been shot by the Boers. If this took place during an action no

blame can fairly attach to the enemy, for in repelling an attack they cannot of course be expected to cease fire because stretcher-bearers show themselves in front. The hail of bullets comes whistling along—ispt, ispt, ispt—and everywhere little jets of sand are spurting up. Can we wonder if now and then a stretcher-bearer is struck down? To put the case frankly—he is doing a brave work, but he has no business to be where he is. It is easy to see why the usages of war do not permit the presence of ambulance men in the firing line. Quite apart from the serious losses incurred by so valuable a corps, advantage might be taken by an unscrupulous enemy to bring up ammunition under cover of the Red Cross.

It is no easy task in the dark or in a fading light to find the khaki-clad figures lying prone upon the brown sand. But when the wounded are discovered the ambulance man finds out as quickly as he can the position and nature of the wound, and a “first aid” bandage or a rough splint is applied. The sufferer is raised carefully upon a stretcher or carried off in an ambulance



waggon to a "dressing-station" somewhere in the rear. If there are not enough stretchers, or the wound is merely a slight one, the disabled soldier is borne away on a seat made of the joined hands of two bearers. A second row of ambulance waggons is loaded from the dressing-station—each waggon holds nine—and goes lumbering off to the field hospital. Here the men are laid on the ground with perhaps a waterproof sheet under them and a blanket over them. The R.A.M.C. officers come round, select certain cases for operation, and see to the bandaging and dressing of the others. Finally one of the ambulance trains arrives, about 120 men are packed in it and it steams off rapidly to some base hospital at Orange River, De Aar, Wynberg or Rondebosch.

Any detailed account of Lord Methuen's battles lies outside the scope of this little volume, and the British public know already practically all that can be known about the general plan of such engagements as Belmont, Graspan and Modder River.

Belmont is an insignificant railway station

lying in the middle of as dreary a bit of veldt as can well be imagined. A clump of low kopjes run almost parallel to the railway on the right, and to ascend these hills our men had to advance over an absolutely level plain devoid of any cover save an occasional big stone or an anthill (precarious rampart !) or the still feebler shelter of a bush two feet high. In their transverse march our men had to cross the railway, and lost considerably during the delay occasioned by cutting the wire fences on either side to clear a way for for themselves and the guns.

The Boers did not apparently intend to make any serious stand against Lord Methuen's column at Belmont. The fight was little else than an "affair of outposts" on their side and it seems very doubtful if more than 800 of the enemy had been left for the defence of the position. Their horses were all ready, as usual, behind the kopjes, and when our gallant men jumped up with a cheer and for the last 100 yards dashed up the rough stony slope in front, very few Boers remained. Most of them were already in the saddle, galloping off to Graspan, their next

position. The unwounded Boers who did remain remained—nearly all of them—for good; rifle bullets and shrapnel and shell splinters are deadly enough, but deadliest of all is the bayonet thrust. So much tissue is severed by the broad blade of the Lee-Metford bayonet that the chances of recovery are often very slight. As volunteer recruits know sometimes to their cost, the mere mishandling of a bayonet at the end of a heavy rifle may, even amid the peaceful evolutions of squad drill, inflict a painful wound. When the weapon is used scientifically with the momentum of a heavy man behind it, its effects are terrible. Private St. John of the Grenadiers thrust at a Boer in front of him with such force that he drove not only the bayonet, but the muzzle of the rifle clean through the Dutchman. St. John was immediately afterwards shot through the head and lay dead on the top of the kopje, side by side with the man he had killed.

When our train, after its journey to Capetown, next returned to Belmont, few signs of the recent engagement were visible. The strands of wire fencing on either side the line were cut through

here and there, and twisted back several yards where our fifteen-pounders had been galloped through to shell the retreating Boers. Now and again the eye was caught by little heaps of cartridge cases marking the spot where some soldier had lain down.

Less pleasant reminiscences were furnished by the decomposing bodies of several mules, and four or five vultures wheeling over the plain. Some enthusiasts on our train had on the previous journey cut off several hoofs from the dead mules as relics of the fight. Our under-cook had secured a more agreeable souvenir of Belmont in the shape of a small goat found wandering beside the railway. This animal now struts about a garden in Capetown with a collar suitably inscribed around its neck, and the proud owner has refused a £10 note for it. Before their abandonment of the position the enemy had hurriedly buried a few of their dead, but it is very difficult to dig amongst the stones and boulders, and the interment was so inadequate that hands and feet were protruding from the soil. In fact several of our men whose patrol-beat covered

this ground told me it was terribly trying to walk among these rough and ready graves in the heat of the day.

Along the whole line from Belmont northwards and to some distance southwards the telegraph lines had been cut by the Boers. Not content with severing the wires here and there, they had cut down every post for miles along the railway. I wondered what the grinning Kaffirs thought of such a spectacle ; here were the white men, the pioneers of enlightenment, engaged in cutting each other's throats and destroying the outward signs of their civilisation ! Perhaps it is worth mentioning that native opinion in Cape Colony has, as far as can be judged from the native journal *Imvo*, been decidedly against us in the present war. This is a factor which must be reckoned with as regards the question whether or no blacks shall be armed and permitted to share in the fighting. Of course it seems at first sight perfectly fair to give the Zulus or Basutos the means of defending themselves from cattle-raiding Boers, but if you once arm a savage

there is a very real danger of his getting out of control, and Zulus might make incursions into the Free State or Basutos into Cape Colony. From such things may we be preserved ! There is an intensely strong feeling amongst colonial Englishmen as well as Dutchmen—much more intense than anything we feel at home—against the bringing of natives into a quarrel between white men.

The train soon traverses the distance between Belmont and Graspan. None can wish to linger on this journey, for the surrounding region is dreary and forbidding. The everlasting kopje crops up here and there, looking like—what in fact it is—a mere vast heap of boulders and stones from which the earth has been dislodged by the constant attrition of wind and rain. The hillocks in the Graspan district are by no means lofty—none of them seemed to get beyond a few hundred feet—but beyond Modder River the big kopje on the right which was seamed with Boer trenches must be, I should guess, well over six hundred feet from the plain. A large proportion of the kopjes in this part of

the country have absolutely flat tops—why, I cannot imagine—and the whole appearance of the country suggests at once the former bed of an ocean. *A propos* of geology, I once in camp came across a sergeant who was surrounded by a little band of privates, deeply interested in his scientific remarks, which began as follows : “ Now, some considerable time before the Flood, Table Mountain was at the bottom of the sea, for sea shells are found there at the present day, etc.” It is quite a mistake to suppose that the soldier cares for none of these things. As a “ Tommy ” myself I had some unique opportunities of learning what they talked about and how they talked, and certainly the subjects discussed sometimes covered a very big field. I have heard a heated discussion as to the position of the port of Hamburg, and was finally called on to decide as arbitrator whether this was a Dutch or German town. Theological discussions were also by no means infrequent. One of my comrades insisted with a fervour almost amounting to ferocity upon the reality of “ conversion,” and was opposed by another

whose tendencies were more Pelagian, and who went so far as to maintain that no one would employ the services of a "converted" man if he could secure one who was "unconverted". The amount of bad language evoked in the course of this theological argument was extraordinary. Such acrimonious discussions as these acted, however, as a mere foil to our general harmony, and a common practice on an evening when we had no wounded on our hands was to start a "sing-song". The general tone of these concerts was decidedly patriotic. "God save the Queen" and "Rule Britannia" were thrown in every now and then, but seldom, if ever, I am glad to say, that wearisome doggerel "The Absent-Minded Beggar". It is quite a mistake, by the way, to suppose that Mr. Kipling's poetry is widely appreciated by the rank and file of the army. From what I have noticed, the less intelligent soldiers know nothing at all about Mr. Kipling's verses, while the more intelligent of them heartily dislike the manner in which they are represented in his poems—as foul-mouthed, godless and utterly careless of their duties to



wives and children. I remember a sergeant exclaiming: "Kipling's works, sir! why, we wouldn't have 'em in our depôt library at any price!" Of course it would be ridiculous to maintain that many soldiers do not use offensive language, but the habit is largely the outcome of their social surroundings in earlier life and is also very infectious; it requires quite an effort to refrain from swearing when other people about one are continually doing this, and when such behaviour is no longer viewed as a serious social offence. As to Mr. Atkins' absent-mindedness I shall have a word to say later on.

In addition to the National Anthem and "Rule Britannia," we had, of course, "Soldiers of the Queen," and a variety of other less known ballads which described the superhuman valour of our race, and deplored the folly of any opposition on the part of our enemies even if they outnumbered us by "ten to one". One of our cook's greatest hits was a song entitled "Underneath the Dear Old Flag". In order to furnish a touch of realism the singer had secured a small *white* flag which floated on the top of

our train ; but he never seemed to realise the incongruity of waving this peaceful emblem over his head as he thundered out his resolve " to conquer or to die ".

Just below Graspan Station the Boers had made one of their many attempts to wreck the line. They had torn up the metals and the sleepers, and a good many bent and twisted rails lay beside the permanent way. But this sort of injury to a railway is very speedily set right. In an hour or two a party of sappers can relay a long stretch of line if no culverts or bridges are destroyed. Mishaps to the telegraph are still more easily repaired, and already, side by side with the wreckage of the original wires, the piebald posts of the field telegraph service ran all along the lines of communication.

Here and there Kaffir families sat squatting about their primitive huts, or kept watch over flocks of goats and sheep. Ostriches stalked solemnly up to the railway and gazed at the train, and sometimes their curiosity cost them the loss of a few tail feathers if we could get a snatch at them through the wire railings. On

one occasion a soldier attempting to take this liberty with an ostrich was turned upon by the indignant bird, and a struggle ensued which might have proved serious to the man ; he was, however, lucky enough to get a grip on the creature's neck and succeeded by a great effort in killing it. Ordinarily, however, the ostriches, despite an occasional surrender of tail feathers, lived on terms of amity with our men, and at Belmont they were to be seen walking about the camp and concealing their curiosity under a great show of dignity. During the fight one of these birds took up its quarters with a battery, and watched the whole battle without taking any food, except that on one occasion when a man lit his pipe the bird suddenly reached out for the box of lucifers and swallowed it with great gusto.

It was curious to notice a variety of chalk marks upon some of the ant hills on the battlefield. The Boers had carefully measured their ground beforehand, as we did at Omdurman, and knew exactly how to adjust their sights as we advanced against their position. The battle

of Graspan consisted, as at Belmont, in a frontal attack upon a line of kopjes held by a much larger force of the enemy than was present at the earlier engagement. Lord Methuen succeeded in working his way to the foot of the kopjes, and a final rush swept the Boers away in headlong flight. His victory would have been much more complete had the cavalry succeeded in cutting off the enemy's retreat, but this was not done.

We brought back a load of wounded men from this fight. The corps which suffered most heavily was the naval brigade, composed of 200 marines and 50 bluejackets. It is worth mentioning the numbers here, because I have seen several accounts of this fight in which the gallantry of the "bluejackets" is spoken of in the warmest terms with absolutely no mention of the marines. Correspondents, some of them without any previous knowledge of military matters, repeatedly single out certain regiments and corps for special mention, even when these favoured battalions have not taken any leading part in the battle. We have, of course, had the case of the Gor-

dons at Dargai—who ever hears of any other regiment popularly mentioned in this connection? Again, at the battle of Magersfontein the Gordons were not amongst the Highland battalions which bore the full brunt of that awful fusilade, yet various English newspapers singled them out for special mention. I speak in this way not because I am at all lacking in appreciation for the valour and dash of both Gordons and “bluejackets,” but simply because other regiments who have often done as good or even better work—in special cases—bitterly resent the unfair manner in which their own achievements are sometimes slurred over in the press. Needless to say these thoughtless reports are due almost entirely to journalists and would be repudiated by none more keenly than the gallant men of the Gordon Highlanders and the Royal Navy.

At the battle of Graspán the marine brigade left their big 4·7 guns in the rear and advanced as infantry to the frontal attack. At 600 yards from the Boer lines the order was given to fix bayonets: the brigade then pushed forward for fifty yards further, when it was met by a storm

of Mauser bullets, which had killed and wounded no less than 120 out of the 250 before the survivors reached the foot of the kopjes. It is extremely difficult to clamber up the rough sides of an African kopje. To do it properly one needs india-rubber soles or bare feet, for boots cause one to slip wildly about on the smooth, rough stones. By the time our men had got to the summit of the low ridge the Boers had leapt upon their horses and were already nearly 1,000 yards away. Our gallant fellows were out of breath with the arduous climb, and as it is almost impossible to do much effective shooting when one is "blown," and the cavalry had not appeared on the scene, the enemy got off nearly scot free.

Amongst a number of wounded men brought down by our train from Modder River was a private of that fine corps, the R.M.L.I., who had, after passing through the perils of Graspan, suffered an extraordinary casualty at the Modder River fight. He was standing near one of the 4'7 guns which was firing Lyddite shells at the enemy's trenches. Suddenly the force of the

explosion burst the drum of his right ear and, of course, rendered him stone deaf on that side. He was an excellent fellow, very intelligent and well informed, and I hope by this time the surgeons at Simon's Bay naval hospital have provided him with an artificial ear-drum. This marine had, as said above, come out of the awful fire at Graspan unscathed, but I counted no less than *five* bullet holes in his uniform; two of them were through his trousers, two had pierced his sleeves, and the other had passed through his coat just to the left of his heart!

The kopjes which were ultimately carried by the gallantry of our troops at Graspan had been subjected to an awful shell fire before the infantry attack. Nevertheless, the enemy was able to meet the advance with a rifle fire which swept our men down by scores. On the right of the naval brigade there was a little group of nineteen men, of these one only remained! The Boers exhibited here, as elsewhere, the most marvellous skill in taking advantage of cover. These farmers lay curled up behind their stones and boulders while shrapnel bullets by thousands

rained over their position, and common shell threw masses of earth and rock into the air. Then at the moment when the artillery fire was compelled to cease, owing to the near approach of our infantry, the crafty sharp-shooters crawled out of their nooks and crannies and used their rifles with deadly precision and rapidity.

On this point—the general ineffectiveness of artillery fire when the enemy possesses good cover—the history of modern warfare repeats itself. The Russian bombardments of Plevna were quite futile, and General Todleben acknowledged that it sometimes required a whole day's shell fire to kill a single Turkish soldier. At the fight round the Malaxa blockhouse in Crete, at which I was present, the united squadrons of the European powers in Suda Bay suddenly opened fire on the hill and the village at its foot. In ten minutes from eighty to one hundred shells came screaming up from the bay and burst amongst the insurgents and their Turkish opponents. We all of us—on the hill and in the village—bolted like rabbits and took what cover we could. The total net casualties from these



missiles—some of them 6-inch shells—were, I believe, three, all told.

Some of those amateur critics at home who write indignant letters about the War Office labour under a twofold delusion. They frequently ask indignantly how it is that our guns have been outclassed by those of the Boers? As a matter of fact in almost every engagement of the present campaign our artillery has been superior to that of the enemy; but, of course, the artillery of a defending force, well posted on rising ground, possesses enormous advantages over that of the assailants, who have frequently to open fire in open and exposed positions easily swept by shrapnel fire from guns, which, hidden amid trenches and rocks, are often well-nigh invisible.

Another fundamental error in many of the indignant letters about the alleged defects of our artillery arises from a misunderstanding of the real value of guns in attacking a fortified position. The most sanguine officer never expects his shells actually to kill or disable any very large number of the enemy if they are protected by deep and well-constructed earthworks.

Of course, if a shell falls plump into a trench it is pretty certain to play havoc with the defenders, but, when one considers that the mouth of a trench is some five or six feet wide, it is easy to realise the difficulty of dropping a shell into the narrow opening at a range, say, of 4,000 yards. Moreover, some of the more elaborate Boer trenches are so cleverly constructed in a waving line like a succession of S's, that even if a shell does succeed in pitching into one bit of the curve it makes things uncomfortable only for the two or three men who occupy that portion of the earthwork. No, the real value of artillery in attack is to shake the enemy and keep down his rifle fire. If shells are accurately fired the tops of trenches may be swept by a constant rain of shrapnel bullets, under which the enemy's riflemen will of necessity suffer when they expose their heads and shoulders to take aim over the parapet. But even in this case the shell fire must be extremely accurate if it is to be of any great use. If shrapnel shells burst well, some thirty yards in front of the enemy, the force of the bullets released by the explosion is terrific ;

if, on the other hand, the shells burst high up in the air, 150 yards in front, you might almost keep off the bullets with an umbrella ; and one sometimes hears of these missiles being actually found in the pockets of combatants. At Omdurman our shells played tremendous havoc with the dense masses of the enemy ; but here the Dervishes advanced to the attack in broad daylight and over a flat plain absolutely devoid of cover, and with its "ranges" well known and marked out beforehand.

In one of our southward journeys with a load of wounded men we passed, a little below Graspan, through the midst of a swarm of locusts. We pulled up the windows and so kept the wards free from these clumsy insects. At one period they seemed to almost shut out the daylight, and it was easy to realise how unpleasant it would be to meet a flight of locusts when walking or even riding on horseback. Some odd stories are told about these creatures. I have heard it gravely stated that occasionally a train is stopped by the accumulated masses which fall on the metals. My informant evidently believed that

the engine in these cases was absolutely unable to force its way through the piled up insects, in the same way as trains are sometimes blocked by gigantic snowdrifts ! This, of course, is ridiculous ; what really happens is that the rails become so greasy from the crushed bodies of the locusts that the wheels can secure no grip on the metals and spin round to no purpose.

The attitude of the Boers towards the locust is very quaint. If a swarm of these insects settles on a Dutchman's land, the owner will not attempt to destroy them because he regards them as a visitation of Providence. But I have heard that he does not scruple to modify slightly the schemes of Providence by shovelling the unwelcome locusts upon any of his neighbours' fields which may adjoin his own estate !

On this same journey we pulled up, as usual, for a brief interval at De Aar, and just opposite our train was a carriage containing seventeen Boer prisoners, returning to the front. At the battle of Graspan a number of Boer artillerymen were found with the Geneva Red Cross on their arms, and it seems pretty clear that these men

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had deliberately slipped the badge on the sleeves in order to avoid capture. They were, of course, at once secured and treated as ordinary prisoners of war. But in the hurry of the moment, and very naturally under the circumstances, some seventeen of the Boers who were *bonâ-fide* ambulance men were arrested on suspicion and despatched with the crafty gunners to Capetown. Here they were examined, and when the authorities realised that they were genuinely entitled to the protection of the Red Cross, and were not combatants fraudulently equipped with this protective badge, the seventeen were forthwith sent back to General Cronje. As they were returning we met them and had a chat with them. Five at least of the number were Scotchmen or Irishmen; two more of them did not speak, and I rather think from their appearance that they too were of English race, and preferred to remain silent. Several of them complained of ill-treatment at our hands, but I must say their complaints appeared to resolve themselves into the fact that on their journeys to and from Capetown their meals had not been quite regular.

Three of us gave them some bread, jam and cigarettes, for which they were extremely grateful. They wore ordinary clothes much the worse for wear, and told me that they left their "Sunday" suits at home. On the whole I was most favourably impressed by these fellows, with one exception. The exception was a Free-Stater who spoke English volubly. He loudly declared that he was sick of the war and intended the moment he secured an opportunity to desert and go home to his farm. I felt rather indignant at this person's remarks, and with an air of moral superiority I said: "We don't think any the better of you for saying that; although you are an enemy you ought to stick to your General, and not sneak away from the front". But the Free-Stater was not a bit impressed by my rhetoric, and simply said, "Oh, skittles!"

Some of the prisoners were from the Transvaal and they seemed to me much more keen and enthusiastic than their Free State companions, and evinced no signs whatever of despondency or depression. There was a very pathetic note in the conversation of one of the Transvaalers,

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a mere boy of seventeen. He said to me in broken English, "It is such a causeless war. What are we fighting for, sir?" and I referred him for his answer to three Johannesburg Uitlanders who were standing by. Accursed as war always is, it is thrice accursed when young boys and old men are called upon to fight. At present every man in the Republic from sixteen to sixty years of age is at the front. The authorities intend as their losses increase to call out children from twelve to sixteen, and every old man from sixty onwards who can still see to sight a rifle. Last and most terrible thought of all, it is an undoubted fact that wives and daughters are everywhere throughout the Republic engaged in rifle practice! May God preserve us from having to fight against women! At present entire families are fighting together. I know one Dutch lady who has no less than six brothers amongst the burghers who have been fighting round Ladysmith, and another who has already lost four sons in the war. In one of our engagements a Boer boy of seventeen was struck down by a bullet; the father, a man of sixty, left

his cover and went to the succour of his son, when he himself was shot, and the two lay dead, one beside the other.

A little to the north of the kopjes which formed the scene of the Graspan engagement lies the station of Enslin. Here one of the pluckiest fights of the campaign took place. Two companies of the Northamptons occupied a small house and orchard beside the line. They had thrown up a hurried earthwork and placed rails along the top of the parapet. In this position they were suddenly attacked by a force of apparently 500 Boers—so it was supposed—with one or two field guns. The small garrison lined their diminutive trenches and succeeded in keeping the enemy off for several hours ; but had not some artillery reinforcements come up the line most opportunely to their assistance it might have fared badly with the plucky Northamptons. As it was, the Boers finally withdrew with some loss. On December 10th we were delayed for some time at Enslin by an accident and I had a careful look at the position held by our men in this minor engagement. There was scarcely a



twig or leaf in the orchard which was not torn by shrapnel and Mauser bullets. The walls of the house were chipped and pierced in every direction, and one corner of the earthwork had been carried off by a shell. Yet in the two companies there were only eight casualties! An almost parallel case was furnished by Rostall's orchard at Modder River, which was held by the Boers, and swept for hours by so fearful a fire of shrapnel that the peach-trees were cut down in every direction and scarcely a square foot behind the trenches unmarked by the leaden hail. Nevertheless, when the guns had perforce to cease fire on the advance of our infantry, the Boers who held the orchard leapt up from behind the earthwork and poured such a murderous fire upon our men that they were forced to withdraw. It was the old story over again—that shell fire, unless it enfilades, does not kill men in trenches.

As everybody called the river crossed by the railway the Modder, Modder let it be. Its real name, however, is the Riet, of which the Modder is a tributary flowing from the north-west and

joining the main stream well to the east of the line. As a stream the river does not impress the visitor favourably: its waters were yellow and muddy, and the vegetation on its banks was thin and scrappy. There are no respectable fish in either the Modder or the Orange River; even if the fish could see a fly on the top of the liquid mud, they haven't the spirit to rise at it. Some of our officers, it was said, had managed to land a few specimens of a coarse fish like a barbel which haunts these streams, but I should not think any one, even amid the monotony of camp rations, was very keen about eating his catch, for a good many dead Boers had been dragged out of the river. It was, in fact, a rather grisly joke in camp to remark, *à propos* of our water supply, on the character of "Château Modder, an excellent vintage with a good deal of body in it"! There was a tap at the station, which by the way is some distance north of the river, but on attempting to fill a bucket I found the tap guarded by a sentry, because, apparently, the water came from the river and was thought to be dangerous.

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The water question is always a difficult one in exploring or campaigning. One can do a certain amount with alum towards rendering the water less foul. Rub the inside of a bucket with a lump of alum, and in ten minutes most of the mud sinks to the bottom, and the water is comparatively clear. But besides producing a nasty flavour in the water, if used in any quantity, the astringent alum tends to produce disagreeable effects internally. Of course the only absolute guarantee against the bacilli of enteric fever or other diseases which may be admitted into one's system by drinking, is to boil the waters for five minutes ; but it is very provoking, when the thermometer stands at 90° in the shade, to wait until the boiled water cools, and as it is impossible to boil a whole river a few thousand bacilli may quite well get into our food through "washing up".

The Boers have almost raised trench digging to the level of a fine art, and on every occasion when their commandants have found it necessary to withdraw they have had an entrenched position ready for them at some distance in the

rear. At Modder River the trenches on either side of the stream were, as far as I saw them, a series of short ditches holding about six riflemen. These small trenches were separated from each other in order possibly to avoid that appearance of continuity which would have rendered their detection more easy to our scouts. In the Modder River fight a new factor is noticeable. For the first time in the campaign the Boers fought on level ground. Hitherto their bullets had come from the summits of the hills, and for this reason had not proved nearly so effective as a sustained fire from rifles raised, say, about four and a half feet from the ground. It is of course very much harder to hit a moving enemy when you aim from above at a considerable angle than when you merely hold your rifle steadily at the level of his chest and fire off Mauser cartridges at the rate of twenty a minute. The enemy's fire was very deadly at the Modder. As Lord Methuen said in his despatch, it was quite unsafe to remain on horseback at 2,000 yards' range. The result was that our infantry were compelled to lie prone on the ground, and,

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without being able to do much by way of retaliation, were exposed for hours to a scathing fusillade from the trenches beside the river. One poor fellow, of whom I saw a good deal, had been through the battle despite the fact that he was suffering great pain from dysentery. He, together with two friends, lay on the veldt for no less than fourteen hours. They had fortunately descried a slight hollow in the ground some 500 yards from the Boer trenches, and between them they "loosed off" quite 1,000 rounds of ammunition. "Well," I asked him, "did you hit anything?" "I don't think we did," was his reply, "because we never saw a Boer the whole day." When the enemy are firing smokeless powder behind their splendidly constructed earthworks they are practically invisible, a fact born witness to by Captain Congreve, V. C., in his account of the first reverse at the Tugela. Now of course when you can't see your enemy you can't very well hit him, so when we clear our minds of fairy-stories about Lyddite and the universal destruction wrought by concussion, it seems highly probable that

there is much more truth in the Boers' returns of their casualties than has been believed at home. Take, *e.g.*, the lurid account sent by one of our correspondents about the awful effects of our shell fire upon General Cronje's laager. We were told in graphic language of every space in the laager being torn and rent by the deadly fire of more than fifty field guns, of the trenches being enfiladed and the green fumes of Lyddite rising up from the doomed camp. Cronje emerges with a casualty roll of 170 men, and the only inconvenience from our bombardment experienced by the ladies was the slight abrasion of a young woman's forefinger!

The fact that so many of our Generals have been struck by bullets during the campaign would seem to corroborate what I have heard on good authority, *viz.*, that some of the best shots in the Transvaal forces have been told off for long range shooting, and the picking off of our leaders. One of these fancy shots—a German—was captured in Natal and told an officer that he was glad to be a prisoner, as he heartily disliked the task imposed upon him. Some

little distance north of the Modder bridge is a small white house. Within this was found a Boer lying on a table stone-dead, with a shrapnel bullet in his skull. His Mauser, still clutched in his stiffened hands, lay on a tripod rest in front of him and the muzzle pointed through a vertical slit made in the masonry of the cottage.

Every house in the neighbourhood was more or less injured by shrapnel, and one of them was the scene of a sanguinary conflict which was utterly misrepresented by one of the Cape papers. The misrepresentation was to the effect that at the battle of Modder River the house in question was occupied by a number of Boer wounded from Belmont and Graspan in charge of several attendants. It was alleged that two of the attendants deliberately fired upon our troops, who forthwith entered the house and bayoneted every occupant, wounded and unwounded alike, the bodies being afterwards weighted with stones and thrown into the river. This terrible story spread like wildfire through the Colony, and Lord Methuen despatched an official denial of the alleged circum-

stances to Capetown. The Boer General never, as far as I am aware, brought any such charge against our troops, but as it undoubtedly gained considerable credence in the Colony it is perhaps worth while to mention the real facts of the case. The house in question was occupied as an out-post by thirty-six Boers, who fired upon some companies of British troops. About a dozen of our men, chiefly Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders with a lieutenant of the Fifth Fusiliers—for an extraordinary intermingling of various units took place in this engagement—rushed the house. Two of the Highlanders were shot down but the rest took a speedy revenge. The thirty-six Boers clubbed their rifles and fought pluckily, but they were crowded together and could do little against our bayonets. Every man of the thirty-six perished. "I didn't like to see it, sir," said one of the Highlanders to me. This is, of course, a very different story from the disgraceful tale alluded to above. None of the Boers in the house were wounded before our men appeared on the scene, and it is clear that the Boer corpses in the river, with



stones tied to their ankles, were put there by their own comrades.

Fair-minded and thoughtful men who have followed the events of the present campaign must long ago have come to the conclusion that non-official news must frequently be received with great caution. Before the war began misrepresentation was rife on both sides, and it has continued ever since. Mr. Winston Churchill may well call South Africa a "land of lies". Various slanders against ourselves have emanated to some extent from the Dutch papers in Cape Colony and the Transvaal, but in a much fuller and more substantial form from the Continental papers, notably the Parisian Press. On the other hand, our own journalists have not been altogether free from this taint. Let us take one or two concrete instances, *e.g.*, violation of the white flag, firing on ambulances, the use of "explosive" bullets, looting. Just after the first reverse at the Tugela, a correspondent wired home that the Boers were "shooting horses and violating all the usages of civilised warfare". A man who would write such tomfoolery about horses ought to be

kept in Fleet Street, and not sent out as a war correspondent; and as to his sweeping accusations in general, it is worth noticing that he was publicly and severely rebuked by Sir Redvers Buller, who denied his statements, and said that it was dishonourable to malign our brave opponents in this fashion.

As to the *vexata quaestio* of the white flag, it seems clear that in some instances the Boers have used this symbol of surrender in an absolutely unjustifiable way. Such a misuse of the flag occurred, for example, at Belmont.\* But, as a Boer prisoner said to me, there are blackguards in every army, and it is utterly unfair to represent the whole Boer army as composed of these treacherous scoundrels—who, by the way, in almost every instance have paid the penalty of their treachery with their lives. Moreover, a white flag—which is sometimes merely a handkerchief tied to a rifle—may, in a comparatively undisciplined force like that of our opponents, be

\* Since these lines were written Lord Roberts has personally testified to the misuse of the white flag in the Paardeberg fighting.

easily raised by a combatant on one side of a kopje, without being ordered or being noticed by his officer or the bulk of his comrades. How easily this may happen can be seen from what occurred amongst our own men at Nicholson's Nek. Here the white flag was raised, according to the published letter of an officer present, by a subaltern, without the knowledge and against the wishes of the officer in command. The officer who raised the flag may quite well—we do not know the circumstances accurately—have wished to save the lives of the men immediately round him, or may have been unable to see what was happening elsewhere on the kopje, and so have imagined that he and his men alone were left.

Something very similar to this appears to have happened at Dundee. A body of Boers standing together raised a white flag when our men approached and were duly taken prisoners, but the rest of their commando were, according to Boer accounts, already engaged in retreating with their guns, and, being either unaware of this unauthorised surrender or completely ignoring it, continued their flight.

I have already spoken of the risks incurred by stretcher-bearers and ambulance waggons which approach close to the firing line. Wounded men have told me again and again that the Boers at Magersfontein did not fire wilfully on our ambulance waggons, except when our troops got behind them in their retreat. Moreover, excitable people in England, who greedily swallow any story about such alleged occurrences, have probably the vaguest idea of what a modern battle-field looks like, and of the enormous area now covered by military operations. It may be extremely difficult to see a small white or Red Cross flag a long way off. At Ladysmith, *e.g.*, one of our guns put a shell clean through a Boer ambulance, and Sir George White, of course, at once sent an apology for the mistake. If mistakes occur on one side they may occur on the other. Reuter's agent at Frere Camp reports on 4th December:—

“After the evacuation of Dundee the Boers shelled the hospital and the ambulance until the white flag was hoisted, when their firing ceased. Captain Milner rode with one orderly into the Boer camp with a flag of truce, and was told

that the Boers could not see the Red Cross flag. This statement he verified by personal observation."

As to the use of "explosive" bullets, which makes the "man in the street" so indignant, it is worth mentioning that, as far as I am aware, not a single instance of the employment of such a missile came under the notice of our medical staff with Lord Methuen's column. I do not for one instant deny that occasionally such bullets may have been fired at our troops, but it is clear that the utmost confusion prevails about the nature of these projectiles. The Geneva Convention prohibits the use of explosive bullets, *i.e.*, hollow bullets charged with an explosive which is fired by a detonating cap on coming in contact with a resisting surface. Now it is almost impossible to render a Mauser bullet "explosive," owing to its extreme slenderness, so that any explosive bullets which may have been used by the enemy must have come from sporting rifles, which are—as all evidence goes to show—extremely rare in their commandos. Expansive bullets are made by cutting off the rounded tip

of the bullet, scooping out its point, constructing its "nose" of some softer metal, or simply making transverse cuts across the end. These missiles are not prohibited by the Geneva Convention : nevertheless their employment against white men is altogether unnecessary and reprehensible.

As to looting, we must not forget that all commandeering of goods on the part of the enemy has been so described. But, of course, it is perfectly legitimate according to the usage of modern warfare to seize any property necessary for an army provided receipts are duly handed over to the persons from whom the goods are obtained. The Germans invariably acted in this way during the Franco-Prussian war, and no historian has ever described them as "savages" for this reason. Of course the wanton destruction of property which appears to have been perpetrated by the Boers in Natal is absolutely indefensible.

If any one on reading the above thinks the writer "unpatriotic" he can only say that many British soldiers serving their Queen and country are "unpatriotic" in the same way. I hold no

brief for the Boers, and I feel sure that here and there one may find an unmitigated scoundrel in their ranks who would fire on white flags, loot houses and use explosive bullets. On the other hand wounded and captured soldiers have repeatedly testified to the great kindness shown them by the enemy. In short, I have invariably found soldiers more generous and fair towards the enemy, and less disposed to blackguard them recklessly and unjustly, than newspaper writers and readers. Men who have faced the Boers have learnt to respect their courage and devotion, and I feel sure that British officers and soldiers deprecate much of the atrocity talk anent foemen so worthy of their steel, and however little they may sympathise with some portions of Dean Kitchin's sermon, they would at any rate desire to support his wish that the "quarrel should be raised to the level of a gentlemen's quarrel".\* Quite recently Lord Methuen spoke like an

\* Cf. *The River War*, by Winston Spencer Churchill, vol. ii., p. 394. "It is the habit of the boa-constrictor to besmear the body of its victim with a foul slime before he devours it; and there are many people in England, and perhaps elsewhere, who seem to be unable to con-

honourable and chivalrous British soldier when he declared that he "never wished to meet a braver general than Cronje and had never served in a war where less vindictive feelings existed between the two opposing armies than in this."

One more word on a kindred topic and we will leave criticism alone! The tone adopted by some sections of the Colonial and even British Press with respect to the religious feeling of the Boers is very painful. Some correspondents have described with evident glee how Boer prayer-meetings have been broken up by Lyddite shells. I feel sure that no British General would think for a moment of deliberately shelling any body of the enemy assembled for prayer, and the vulgarity and wickedness of such paragraphs would certainly not commend itself to the best sentiment of the British army. Again and again the Boers are described in the Press as "canting hypocrites" or their thanksgivings to God as "sanctimonious". What right have we as Chris-

temple military operations for clear political objects, unless they can cajole themselves into the belief that the enemy is utterly and hopelessly vile."



tians to bring such wholesale charges against our Christian enemies? Several thousand burghers advanced from Jacobsdal to reinforce Cronje, and as it marched the entire force sang the Old Hundredth in unison. There is something splendid and majestic in such a spectacle as this. Let us as Englishmen fight our best against these men and defeat them thoroughly, but do not let us sneer at their religious enthusiasm!

On December 10th, as we were standing on a siding at De Aar, a telegram arrived ordering us to leave for Modder River in the morning. We were delighted at the prospect of getting rid of our enforced inaction at De Aar. The air was full of rumours about an impending attack on Cronje's position, and we fully expected to be in time for the fight and probably to be employed as stretcher-bearers during the battle. Alas! our hopes were all in vain. Next day, some miles below Modder River, our engine with its tender suddenly left the metals. The stoker jumped off, but the engine fortunately kept on the top of the embankment and nobody was hurt. We none of us knew how or why the

accident had occurred, but one of the officials suspected very strongly that the rails had been tampered with.

At any rate, there we were within a few miles of a big fight, off the metals and quite helpless! We were all perfectly wild with vexation and disappointment. But up flew a wire to Modder River for a gang of sappers with screwjacks. Pending the arrival of their assistance I climbed up to the top of a neighbouring kopje with a lot of Tasmanians. From this point the flashes of the guns above Modder River were visible, and the dull boom of Lyddite was borne to our ears. Methuen's artillery was still doing its best to avenge or retrieve the disaster of the early morning. The sappers at length arrived. We all helped—pushing and digging and lifting—and at length after several hours' delay steamed off to Modder River, too late for anything, except to wait for the morning and the wounded. We knew by this time that at 3.30 that morning the Highland Brigade had made a frontal attack on the Magersfontein lines and had been repulsed with terrible loss. The accounts which were

vaguely given of the disaster were frightful, but accurate details were still lacking. Yes, here we were within four miles of the nearest point of Cronje's lines and we did not know half as much about the fight as people in Pall Mall 7000 miles away !

On 12th of December I woke at four. The sun was just beginning to rise and the raw chill of the night had not yet left the air. In the grey light a long string of ambulance waggons was moving slowly towards the camp from the battle-field. Parallel to the line of waggons a column of infantry was marching northwards, perhaps to reinforce some of our outlying trenches against a possible Boer attack. I shall long remember the sight—the column of dead and wounded coming in, the living column going out, and scarcely a sound to break the silence.

The wards of the train were all ready for the wounded, so I went off with a couple of buckets to replenish our water supply. Wounded men are generally troubled with thirst, and the washing of their hands and faces always refreshes them greatly. I found the station tap, however,

guarded by a sentry ; no water was to be drawn for the use of the troops, as the pipes—so it was said—came from Modder River, which was contaminated by the Boer corpses.

We were soon busy with the wounded Highlanders and well within an hour we had safely placed some 120 men in our bunks, and some on the floor. I am afraid the poor soldiers often suffered agony when they were lifted in or rolled from the stretchers on to the bunks. It was sometimes impossible to avoid hurting a man with, say, a shattered thigh-bone and a broken arm in thus changing his position. We however did our best and lifted them with the utmost care and gentleness, but they often, poor fellows, groaned and cried out in their cruel pain.

At 6 P.M. we saw the funeral of sixty-three Highlanders—all buried in one long trench close to the line. No shots were fired over the vast grave, but tears rolled down many a bronzed cheek and the bagpipes played a wild lament. Surely there is no music like this for the burial of young and gallant men. The notes seem to

express an almost frenzied access of human sorrow!

Soon after this my old Sudan acquaintance, Frederick Villiers, passed through the train. He did not recognise me in my uniform and I did not make myself known to him as he was with an officer and I was only an orderly. I wonder if he remembers that dreadful night, 31st August, 1898, when we lay side by side in the desert at Sururab, soaked to the skin from a tropical downpour, and, to make his misery complete, he was stung in the neck by a large scorpion.

We ran down to Orange River with our first load of wounded men, and just as we were crossing the sappers' pontoon bridge over the Modder a trolley or small waggon broke loose and rushing down the incline in front met our engine and was broken into matchwood. Most of our cases on this first run were “severe” or “dangerous”. Some of the men had no less than three bullet wounds, and several were still living whose heads had been pierced by bullets. During a former journey, after Belmont, poor —— of the Guards lived for several days with a bullet

through his brain ; he was apparently unconscious or semi-conscious and struggled so desperately to remove the bandages from his head that it took three orderlies to hold him down. When he died the wounded soldier next him burst into tears.

Amongst some cases peculiarly interesting from a medical point of view was that of a Highlander who had three of his fingers shot off with the result that his arm and side were paralysed ; in another case a bullet tore its way through and across the crown of a soldier's head and caused paralysis of the opposite side of the body. Another man had, so it was said, been hit on the shoulder ; the bullet passed right through his body piercing his lungs and intestines and coming out at the thigh. Yet, strange to say, the poor fellow was in excellent spirits and complained only of slight pain in the abdomen.

There was one death at Magersfontein which seemed especially painful to ourselves. It was that of a young officer in the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders who, after the fight on the Modder, came into our train and had a kindly

word for every one of his wounded men; he walked along the wards shaking hands with them and giving them little money presents as he passed. His voice was full of sympathy, and at length he broke down utterly in his compassion for some of their terrible wounds. His tears did him credit, and we heard with genuine sorrow that he had fallen at Magersfontein. So good a man was indeed worthy of a longer life and a kindlier fate.

Almost all the wounds inflicted by the Mauser bullets seemed to be quite clean and healthy, with no signs of suppuration. It has been suggested that the satisfactory condition of such wounds is partly due to a species of cauterisation produced by the heat of the bullet. But I hardly think this can be so, for it is extremely doubtful if a bullet ever gets hot enough to cauterise flesh. I once picked up a spent Martini bullet which dropped within a yard or two of where I was standing; it was quite warm but not nearly hot enough to hurt my bare hand. A Mauser bullet fired at a fairly close range, say, 500 yards, travels at such a tremendous velocity that it

generally splinters any bone it meets; on the other hand at long ranges—1,000 yards and upwards—the bullet frequently bores a clean little hole through the opposing bone and thus saves the surgeon a great deal of trouble.

The wounds from shell fire were not numerous in our wards. It seems likely that if a one-pounder shell from the Maxim-Nordenfeldt hits a man it is pretty sure to kill him. Some of the wounded men told me how terrible it was to hear the cries of a comrade ripped to pieces by this devilish missile.

The condition of the Highlanders' legs was terrible. Many of the poor fellows lay in the open for hours—some of them from 4 A.M. to 8 P.M.—and the back of their legs was, almost without exception, covered with blisters and large burns from the scorching sun. Very many of those who had escaped bullet wounds could not, I should think, have marched ten miles to save their lives. The Highland Light Infantry wore trousers and their legs were all right. How much longer are we going to clothe our Highland regiments in kilts on active service? Every man



I spoke to was dead against their use in a sub-tropical campaign like the present one. Besides, even as it is, our men have to put up with a compromise in the matter of kilts which makes their retention almost ridiculous, *i.e.*, in order to screen his gay attire from the keen eyes behind the Mauser barrels every Highlander wears over the tartan a dingy apron of khaki. The war pictures we occasionally see in illustrated papers of Scotch regiments charging with flying sporrans are probably drawn in England. Even when the apron is used, the khaki jacket, the tartan kilt and the white legs offer a good mark when the wearer is lying on the ground. At Omdurman I stood with the Seaforths and Camerons in the firing line and I noticed that they appeared to lose more than any other battalion.

On arriving at Orange River we carried our load of wounded to the base hospital. I wish some of those well-meaning enthusiasts in Trafalgar Square who clamoured for war could have viewed the interior of these hospital tents and seen the poor twisted forms lying on the ground in every direction. What a stupid and brutal

thing war is! Certainly the alleged "bringing out of our nobler qualities" is dearly purchased! If a superior national type is the outcome of all this death and pain and misery, War, like Nature, seems at any rate utterly "careless of the single life"!

The battle of Magersfontein has been frequently described in the Press and the main outlines of the fight are already well known to the public. The Highland Brigade, consisting of the Black Watch, Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, Seaforths and Highland Light Infantry, had dinner on Sunday at 12. They then marched from 2 to 7.30 P.M., when they bivouacked. They advanced again at 11 P.M. in quarter column through the darkness, using ropes to keep the direction and formation intact. At 3.30 the order to extend had just been given when a murderous fire was suddenly poured into the Brigade from the first line of Boer trenches at the foot of a large kopje. Our men had already seen two red lanterns burning at either extremity of this entrenched position. All at once the lamp on the left of the line was ex-

tinguished, and this seemed to be the signal for the Boer riflemen to commence fire. The light was so bad—in fact there was scarcely any light at all—that it was impossible to see the foresight of a rifle clearly. How were the Boers able to discern our approaching columns? One very intelligent boy in the Black Watch told me that he thought the “wild-fire”—the summer lightning which plays over the veldt—showed up the approaching troops. Others who were present stated that the Kimberley flash-light did the mischief, and a sergeant who marched in the rear of the brigade told me that he could see the whole line of helmets in front of him illumined by these electric flashes. Apart from this, it is quite possible that some treacherous signals from Dutchmen near Modder River camp may have apprised the Boers of our approach.

Be this as it may, the first volleys from the opposing trenches swept through the crowded ranks of the Black Watch with deadly effect. Great confusion ensued, our men could do little by way of retaliation, contradictory orders were given, and the Brigade, unable to hold its ground

under the murderous fire, fell back. The fusilade was fearfully severe and what added to its severity was its unexpectedness. It is especially the case in war that the unexpected is terrible. This has been exemplified again and again. On one occasion during the siege of Paris a body of Zouaves had fought splendidly all day in a sortie under a hot fire from the Prussians. They were at length ordered to withdraw some distance into a hollow which would shield them effectually from the Prussian shells and bullets. The Zouaves ensconced themselves in this excellent bit of cover and after their exertions prepared to get a little rest. Suddenly, to their astonishment, a Prussian shell fell plump into the hollow, and although it hurt nobody the entire company leapt to their feet and never stopped until they found themselves within the ramparts of Paris. Yet these men had faced a deadly fire all day when they expected it.

No troops in the world could have done anything in face of the Magersfontein fire: some of the Highlanders, however, lay down and maintained their position actually within 200

yards of the Boer lines throughout the day. They had scarcely any cover, and if they showed themselves by any movement they were picked off by the enemy's sharp-shooters. Several of our wounded told me that they had seen one Boer, got up in the most sumptuous manner—polished jackboots, silk neck-cloth and cigar—strolling leisurely about outside the trenches and firing with extraordinary accuracy at the recumbent figures which dotted the ground before him.

As the Brigade fell back various units were, in the darkness inextricably mixed up, and our losses became more severe as the accuracy of the enemy's fire increased. The booming of our artillery and the rush of our shells upon the Boer trenches put fresh heart into our temporarily disheartened troops, and rallying lines were formed in various directions. Occasional rushes were made towards the almost invisible enemy over the slope already thickly dotted with the bodies of our dead and wounded, and at the close of the disastrous day several gallant Highlanders were found lying dead across the wire entanglements within 150 yards of the Boers, riddled

with bullets. The 12th Lancers dismounted, and at one moment, advanced as infantry right up to the Boer trenches. Every one I spoke to expressed the warmest admiration for their coolness and pluck.

A sergeant in the Black Watch, when all the officers had apparently been struck down, cried out to the Highlanders near him : "Charge, men, and prepare to meet your God!" He rushed forward at the head of a few comrades and fell dead with a bullet through his brain within a yard or two of the trenches. There is something truly sublime in this man's devotion to his duty. Many and many an individual act of heroism was displayed during those awful moments in the semi-darkness when the enemy opened fire on our crowded battalions. British officers stood upright, utterly regardless of self, doing their best to rally the shaken troops, and then falling beneath the pitiless hail of bullets. Later on the hillside was littered with field-glasses.

Almost 1,000 yards from the line of kopjes three lines of wire had been placed, which were cut during our advance, and other entanglements

were stretched just in front of the trenches. Several men in each company carried wire-cutters with them, but to stand up and snip through lines of barbed wire when the Mauser bullets and the deadly shells of the Pom-Pom gun are tearing up the soil around is perilous work. Some of these entanglements had already been removed after the bombardment on Sunday night, for E Company of the Black Watch and a company of the Seaforths went forward about 7 P.M. in skirmishing order and pulled up the iron stakes and knocked over three parallel lines of barbed wire.

Some of the Highland Brigade very sensibly withdrew towards the right of the Boer position with the idea of outflanking and enfilading the enemy. They succeeded for some time and actually captured some prisoners, but were soon afterwards themselves enfiladed and compelled to retire. Eight men of the Seaforths, however, when the frontal attack failed, retired towards the left instead of the right and suddenly found themselves, to their dismay, well inside the enemy's trenches! The Boers took away their

rifles but forgot their side-arms, whereupon one of the Highlanders drew his bayonet, leapt to his feet and stabbed the sentry who was guarding them in the neck. The whole eight then jumped over the earthwork and decamped, escaping unhurt through the bullets which followed them from the enraged burghers.

Many of our wounded lay on the ground from early morning till seven or eight in the evening, exposed all day to the scorching rays of an almost tropical sun. Some of the men brought away in the ambulances were, in fact, suffering from sunstroke, in addition to their wounds, and, as was said above, the bare legs of the three kilted battalions were terribly burnt. The Boers were very kind to our wounded. They came out of the trenches and gave them water. They did not in any case shoot at our wounded men, but frequently shot at any one who came forward during the fight to bandage the wounded. The slightest movement, however, of the *bonâ-fide* combatants in our ranks drew a hail of bullets from the trenches. A Scotch sergeant, Gilham by name, a most kindly and courageous



man, noticed that a comrade near him had been shot through the abdomen. He raised himself up from his recumbent position and began to bandage the wounded man. "Lie down you — fool," said the friend; "can't you see you are drawing the fire?" As he spoke a bullet passed between Gilham's knees and struck the wounded man. Soon afterwards an officer called out for a stretcher, so Gilham jumped up and put on his best "hundred" pace in a slanting run towards the ambulance waggons. Several other wounded men leapt up and joined him. One of them was immediately shot through the shoulder, and the good sergeant again stopped and bandaged him. The Boers had been watching him, and as he recommenced his devious course they sent two bullets through a bush two feet in front of him. These small bushes formed very inadequate cover, and the enemy, taking for granted that men were lying concealed behind them, fired repeatedly into the shrubs. In one case no less than eight Highlanders were shot behind one bush.

I have made no attempt to give a detailed

account of the day's fighting. If I did I should naturally speak of the excellent work done by the Guards on the right, where the Scandinavian contingent was almost annihilated, and, later on in the day, by the Gordons, who left their convoy work on the left and advanced gallantly towards the Boer position. No praise can be too high for our artillery. It was their excellent shooting that helped our men to rally after the first shock, and which ultimately succeeded in driving the Boers from their first line of trenches. These trenches were admirably constructed in long deep parallel lines connected at the ends so that a force could advance or withdraw from any point without being noticed by ourselves. Shell fire could do little against troops so splendidly entrenched. The Boers, like the Turks at Plevna, crept under their *épaulements* while the shells screamed overhead or swept the parapets with shrapnel bullets, and then, when this tyranny was overpast, crept out and poured in one of the most terrific fusilades of the century's warfare.

When we returned to Modder River with our carriages ready for a fresh load we found all

our troops and guns back again in camp. The trenches, however, were manned, and every one on the alert. The armistice to bury the dead expired on the 13th, and a Boer commando had been sighted to the west. In a brief interval of leisure I took a short stroll, and I noticed how much more plentiful tobacco was now than a month ago when a Mauser rifle was offered for a sixpenny packet of cigarettes. One soldier told me that he had actually paid three shillings for a single cigarette.

We loaded up with 120 fresh cases and steamed off for Capetown. The armoured train was moving fitfully about as we left, but the poor thing's energies were rather cramped as the line disappeared about 300 yards north of the station.

Just before we crossed the river we saw the two war-balloons floating above the camp, and our cook informed us with a great show of expert knowledge that these balloons were absolutely proof against bullets or even shells, "for," said he, "if anything hits them it rebounds from them like my fist does from this 'ere pillow". A rather

similar story was told me by a wounded Highlander. He declared that a pal of his had been struck in the stomach by a shell at the Modder River fight. "Oh," said I, "there wasn't much of your poor friend left, I suppose?" "He wasn't much hurt," was the reply, "though he did spit blood for a few hours." "Great Scot! what became of the shell?" "Oh," said my informant, "I didn't notice, but it must have bounced off Bill's stomach." The soldier quite believed that this marvellous incident had occurred. What had happened was probably this: a shell had passed so close to the man that the concussion of the air had "taken his wind" and ruptured some small blood-vessels. I remember at the capture of Malaxa in Crete that three insurgents were hurled to the ground by the air pressure of a Turkish shell which passed within a yard or two of their heads.

Several of our cases on this downward journey were interesting. Corporal Anderson of the Black Watch lay in our ward, struck deaf and dumb from the bursting of a Boer shell, though he was otherwise uninjured by the explosion.

Wounds through the intestines were to be found here and there. Such injuries in the larger intestines, if left to themselves and not operated on, have—when inflicted by the humane Mauser bullet—a fairly good chance, and that is all that can be said. One man had been shot through the elbow as he lay at the “present”. The bullet had shattered the bone, but there was every prospect of the arm being saved. How different would have been the probable effects, in such a case, of the big Martini bullet !

One incident which seemed to amuse the men very much was this. During the Modder River battle a bullet struck a corporal on the back ; it glanced superficially across his shoulder and then piercing his canteen-tin remained inside. The corporal, imagining himself *in extremis*, fell to the ground and called for the ambulance. Somebody ran up to the prostrate man, and after a diligent but fruitless search for the wound at length discovered the bullet in the canteen-tin. The apparently moribund corporal, seeing this, instantly recovered, and leaping briskly to his feet told them to countermand the stretcher-

bearers and pressed forward to the attack with renewed vigour.

Just as we left De Aar a train full of Queensland Mounted Infantry was entering the station *en route* for the front. The occupants were in the highest spirits and cheered loudly. "Ah!" said some of our poor fellows, "we were like that when we went up!" The contrast between the two trains—there, life and vigour: here, weakness and death—was very striking.

So far from being "absent-minded" about their people at home, the wounded soldiers were continually thinking about their sweethearts, wives and families. Several soldiers in my ward, *e.g.*, had lined their helmets with ostrich feathers. "My eye," said they, "won't the missus look fine in these!" One of the reservists asked me: "Do you think I shall lose my thigh? You see, I want to do the best I can for my family, and if I do lose my leg I shall be useless, as I work in the pits in Fife." Another Scotchman, a shoemaker, was full of anxiety about the future support of his wife and children. "If only my wound," he said deject-

edly, "had been below my knee instead of above it! Because this"—pointing to the wounded spot—"is just the place I use for my work."

Yes! to mix with the rank and file of an army as one of themselves is a great privilege. One understands them in this way far better than through the medium of books. Many little acts of unostentatious heroism are casually spoken of—noble deeds done by humble soldiers who live without a history and often perish without a memorial—as, for instance, the devotion of a private at Modder River who applied digital pressure to the severed artery of a comrade for hours under fire and so saved his life. Again, the soldier's religion, where it exists, is often very genuine indeed. Just after the Magersfontein reverse a wounded Highlander entreated me to find his rosary for him which was hidden under a pile of accoutrements. On another occasion we picked up on the floor of the train a piece of paper which proved to be the will of a poor private, a Roman Catholic, who left "all he possessed" to the Church. I need not say that this will was forwarded to the proper quarter.

The wounded men too were frequently very grateful for any little services one could render them, and made us odd little presents by way of return. One H.L.I. man gave me the badges from his ruined khaki jacket, and an Argyll and Sutherland Highlander bestowed upon me a pair of goggles he had taken from the face of a dead Boer.

By the time we reached Richmond Road the usual influx of private offerings for the wounded had, as usual, begun. We always left the front with the ordinary comforts of an ambulance train; by the time we reached Capetown we looked like a sort of cross between a green-grocer's stall and a confectioner's shop. We simply didn't know what to do with the masses of fruit and flowers, puddings and jellies, which the people along the line forced upon us. These kindly folk—men, women and children—thrust their various offerings through the windows; then they peeped through themselves, and the women would say "poor dear" to some six-foot guardsman, who smiled his thanks or told them how he got hit. As I say, the train was,



by the time we reached Wynberg, simply choked with luxuries—some of them quite unsuitable for wounded men—a veritable *embarras de richesses*. We used to begin the journey with moderation and end it with a species of debauch! But it was most kind and thoughtful of these colonists all the same.

By the time we reached Wynberg on 16th December it was quite dark. A row of ambulance waggons stood ready beyond the platform, and in front of them a line of St. John's Ambulance men, fresh from England, looking very spruce and neat. The wounded were speedily conveyed to the waggons and safely lodged in the hospital. On a former occasion one poor fellow died at the moment he was being lifted out of the train. My comrades and myself had had about six hours' sleep in three consecutive nights, and after we had remade the beds and swept the train we slept soundly. Next morning we were on duty till twelve, when we were allowed a few hours' leave. A warm bath and a lunch at the Royal Hotel with a good bottle of wine was very welcome, and we were all in

excellent spirits when the whistle sounded and we steamed away once more to the north with 600 miles before us.

We halted again at De Aar, where we remained till Christmas. The weather grew hotter and hotter. The whirling dust, the stony plains, the glaring heat, the evening coolness, the glowing sunsets, the bare rocky hills, how it all recalled the Sudan! Train after train lumbered by with stores and guns and ammunition for the front, the whole of this enormous traffic being run on a single line of rails. Amongst the most troublesome items to deal with were the mules. Sometimes a mule would suddenly produce a violent uproar in a waggon by beginning to kick, his hoof against every mule and every mule's hoof against him. Even if these beasties were taken out of the waggon to be watered their behaviour was unseemly. A soldier would with infinite patience marshal the mules in line with himself, their halters all tied together. The march would then begin, but within half a dozen yards the mules in the centre would press forward till the

whole thing looked like a Pyrrhic phalanx. The wearied soldier would then smite the aggressive animals, and, after a few more strides, the centre mules would hang back while the wings would close in, and then, as confusion became worse confounded, some of the restless brutes would commence to roll, and the group finally resembled a sort of mulish "scrum" with the soldier on his back as football.

There were, of course, various camp services on Christmas Day: most of my comrades on the train went to the little Episcopal Church in De Aar. The Church of England community in this out-of-the-way village numbers some fifty all told. Nevertheless these churchmen had contrived to build a pretty little church and their services were very hearty. Officers, men, and two Red Cross sisters formed the bulk of the congregation and we listened to a delightful sermonette written and delivered in excellent style by the good Vicar, an old Corpus man at Oxford. We sang the old familiar hymns, "While shepherds watched" and "Hark, the Herald Angels sing," which took our thoughts

away to distant homes and services in England, 7,000 miles away. At the close of the service came that hymn of prayer, "O God of peace, give peace again;" and as we walked back to the train a sergeant said to me: "If there is a God who will listen to prayer, my prayer for peace went straight to Him". I think he spoke for all of us. Most people who love war for war's sake are not soldiers.

Our Christmas dinner was a most gorgeous affair. We were determined to do everything in the best possible style, and everybody helped. We first rigged up a trestle table beside the train and stretched a tarpaulin above it to shelter us from the fierce heat. Three of our number were then despatched to secure all the green stuff they could for decorative purposes, and as the good people of De Aar were quite ready to give us some of their scanty flowers and allow us to dismember their shrubs, our envoys returned with armfuls of material. The outside of the train and the surface of the table were gaily decorated, and two photographs of her Majesty which we had cut out of magazines were framed

in leaves and flowers and bits of coloured paper, the very best we could do! We had secured an order for some beer and a couple of bottles of whisky, and when these adjuncts had been duly fetched from the canteen we sat down to our Christmas dinner. Towards the end of it our kind and deservedly popular C.O. Captain Fleming, R.A.M.C., paid us a visit, with a civilian doctor and the two nurses. The Captain made us a little speech and informed us that the Queen had sent her best Christmas wishes to the troops. We then cheered her Majesty, and Captain Fleming and Dr. Waters and the nurses, and our visitors left us to enjoy the rest of the evening as we liked.

After various toasts—the Queen, our General, Absent Friends and so on—several comrades from other corps dropped in and every one was called upon for a song. It is curious to find the extraordinary popularity amongst soldiers of lugubrious and doleful songs. The majority of our songs at that Christmas dinner dealt with graves and the flowers that grew upon them, on the death of soldiers and the grief of parents.

One song, I remember, was almost ludicrously sad. It told how a young soldier on active service in the Sudan or some other distant region hears, apparently by telepathic means, that his mother—the conventional grey-haired mother—is in some distress. The soldier at once, without any attempt to secure leave of absence, sets out for “home” on foot. He is brought back, and, as the excuse about his mother is very naturally discredited, the deserter is sentenced to be shot. Just as his lifeless body falls back riddled with bullets the mother arrives—how, it is not explained—so, as the refrain has it, “The Pardon comes too late”. There were also several pauses in the conversation for “solos from the band,” to wit, a flute and a fiddle.

After dismantling the marquee and dinner-table we started through the darkness for Modder River. We had thoroughly enjoyed our Christmas fare, and K——, a Scotchman, attempted with some success to perform a sword-dance on two crossed sticks, and when we pulled up at some station with a Dutch name his fervid patriotism broke loose in an attempt to address

the people on the platform, whom he apostrophised as "rebels" and threatened with dire vengeance. Our cook was equal to the occasion. He dragged K—— back and apologised to the aggrieved colonists, explaining—by a pious fraud—that he was K——'s father and so responsible for bringing him out that evening. Our glee-men now stepped into the breach with "Ye Banks and Braes," and we left the station amid cheers.

Another of my friends under the excitement of song and mirth frequently clutched my arm and pointed to imaginary batches of Dutchmen standing suspiciously near the line and presumably intent on wrecking the train. These were usually prickly-pear bushes. When we approached Modder River he exclaimed that we were now within range of the Boer guns, and accordingly pulled up the windows as a sort of protection against shells and bullets.

As we steamed into Modder River station the 4·7 gun called "Joe Chamberlain" loosed off a Lyddite shell at the Magersfontein trenches. Some desultory shelling continued on both sides

at 7,000 yards, chiefly in the early morning and evening—a kind of “good day” and “good night” exchanged between “Joe Chamberlain” and “Long Tom”. During our stay on this occasion some excellent practice was made on both sides. On the 26th a shell from our gun struck a Boer water-cask and smashed it to bits ; next day a Boer shell fell plump into a party of Lancers and killed four horses. On another occasion more than fifty shells—so I heard—fell round the 4·7 gun, and although the gunners were compelled to seek cover the gun was absolutely uninjured.

Apart from this interchange of artillery fire the camp was undisturbed. The trenches were of course manned day and night, but spare time was filled up to some extent by various games. Goal posts were visible here and there, and Lord Methuen had offered a challenge cup for “soccer” football, the ties of which were being keenly contested.

We took on board a fresh load of sick and wounded men—chiefly the former—bound for Wynberg hospital. Just before we left I walked



a hundred yards from the line and saw the graves of Colonel Downman, Lieutenant Campbell, Lieutenant Fox, and a Swede called, I think, Olaf Nilsen. The graves were marked by simple wooden crosses : those who were enemies in life lay side by side in the gentle keeping of Death, the Healer of Strife, for so the Greeks of old time loved to call him.

Soon after leaving the Modder the sky grew black with clouds, the birds hid themselves from view and the veldt-cricket ceased from his monotonous chirrup. Then all at once the storm burst upon us. The lightning played incessantly and sheets of rain blotted out the kopjes and the veldt from view. It was in weather like this that our poor fellows advanced through the darkness upon the Magersfontein trenches !

At Orange River we halted for some time, and somebody suggested a snake hunt in the scrub, but no one seemed very keen about this form of sport. The "ringhals" in the veldt are very deadly. I remember speaking to a Kaffir about them and asking him if he had known of any fatal bites. He replied, pathetically enough :

"Yes, sah, a brudder of me—two hours, he was dead—mudder and sister and me was there".

Near Enslin a most unhappy accident had occurred. A sentry of the Shropshire had seen two figures advancing in the evening towards his post, had challenged, and, failing to get the prescribed reply, had fired off seven bullets into the two supposed Boers, who turned out to be a sergeant and private of his own regiment. By a miracle both these wounded men ultimately recovered, but while we were at Enslin we heard that the poor sentry was absolutely prostrated by grief and horror over the unfortunate affair.

At a station lower down a lighter incident took place. A corporal from our train, a Johannesburg man, in taking a short stroll came across three Uitlander volunteer recruits. They did not for the moment recognise their quondam acquaintance in his uniform, so he called "Halt!" The recruits became rigid. "Medical inspection," cried the corporal—"Tongues out!" Three tongues were instantly thrust out. "Salute your general," was the next order. This was too much. In the middle of a spasmodic attempt

at a salute a dubious look began to spread over the faces of the three victims, which broadened into certainty as with a yell they leapt upon their oppressor and made him stand them a drink.

At Richmond Road we came across a detachment of Cape Volunteers who were practising the capture of kopjes in the neighbourhood of the line. In condoling with one of them on the dreariness of the place, he remarked that they occasionally shot a hare with a Lee-Metford bullet. This is pretty good shooting if the hare is moving. I remember hearing a Boer say with apparent *bona fides* that he invariably shot birds on the wing with Mauser bullets. Some of his birds must have looked ugly on the table.

As we passed through the Karroo somebody remarked that a Cape newspaper had suggested that our yeomen should ultimately settle in the country and continue their pastoral life in the veldt-farms of South Africa. Evidently the journalist who wrote this article imagines that our gallant yeomen were all tillers of the soil. Even if they were, few Englishmen will care to exchange the green fields and leafy copses of

England for the solitude of these dreary, sun-baked plains. Moreover, where is the land to come from for any considerable number of such settlers? Practically all the land which is worth cultivating in the colonies of South Africa and the two Republics is already occupied. Even if we confiscate the farms of those colonial rebels actually and legally proved to be such, I doubt very much whether the land thus obtained would provide for more than three or four hundred settlers. Enthusiasts in England who write to the papers on this topic seem often to take for granted that the farms of the burghers in the two Republics will at the close of the war be presented to any reservist or yeoman who wishes to settle in South Africa. But is there any precedent in modern times for the confiscation of the private property of a conquered people? Are the burghers who survive the struggle to be evicted from their farms and left with their wives and children to starvation? This would be a bad beginning towards that alleviation of race hatred after the war which all good men of every political party earnestly desire. There

is, it is true, a certain amount of land owned by the State in the Transvaal, but if we distribute this *gratis* to a few hundred individuals we shall be depriving ourselves of one of the few sources from which a war-indemnity could accrue to the nation as a whole.

Nothing, of course, could be more desirable than the planting in South Africa of a large body of honest, hard-working English settlers with their wives and families. But there are many difficulties to be overcome before the idyllic picture of the reservist surrounded by the orchards and cornfields of his upland farm can be realised in actual fact. The Dutch farmers of South Africa are as a rule very poor. They rise up early and take late rest, and eat the bread of carefulness, but their life is one of constant poverty. If we talk of "improvements" we must remember that irrigation in such a country is sometimes difficult and costly, and light railways demand considerable capital. Who is to provide the money for these? I doubt very much if many Englishmen or Australians or New Zealanders *who have seen South*

*Africa* will exchange their present homes for the dreary and unproductive routine of an African farm.

During the latter part of our run the kindly enthusiasm of the colonists was as much in evidence as ever. Offerings of flowers and delicacies were again showered upon the wounded. It was amusing to notice how truculent some of the ladies were. One of them, as she put her welcome basket through the window, remarked *à propos* of Kruger, Steyn, etc., "Yes, bury them all, bury them all!"

After our sick men had been duly conveyed to the hospital we stayed in Capetown till the close of the year. A plentiful supply of English newspapers were lying about in the smoking-room of the hotel and it was exceedingly painful to read of the violent criticisms passed upon our Generals. If journalists in England wish to criticise the behaviour of our Generals, let them do so over their own signature when the war is over and these servants of the Government can defend themselves fairly. During the progress of a campaign a General has practically no op-

portunity of defending himself against newspaper attacks. Military success amid the surroundings of a South African campaign is often so difficult : criticism in Fleet Street is so easy ! Very frequently the same man who cheers wildly at Waterloo and labels the outgoing General's luggage " To Pretoria " is the first to vituperate the same officer if amid the vicissitudes of warfare some measure of defeat falls to his lot. Military success does not depend entirely on the devotion or capacity of a commander. How cruel were those of the paragraphs which we read directed against our own General, Lord Methuen—the only British commander who had, if we except Elands-laagte, won any successes up to the present. Let the public wait before they so freely condemn a General who drove back the enemy in three successive engagements. That Magersfontein was a bad reverse is patent to everybody, but the causes of that defeat are not nearly so apparent.\* It is disgraceful that English newspapers

\* Cf. Tacitus, *Agricola*, xxvii. : Iniquissima haec bellorum condicio est ; prospera omnes sibi vindicant, adversa uni impuntantur.

should, during the progress of a campaign, print letters from soldiers at the front which asperse the character and conduct of their commanding officers. Publicity of this sort strikes at the root of military discipline and common fairness too, for the public can scarcely expect a British General to reply in the public Press to the letter of a private serving under him !

The bells of the Cathedral tolled mournfully as the old year died. Would that its bitter memories could have perished with it ! And then from steeple and steamship, locomotive and factory, a babel of sound burst forth as sirens and bells and whistles welcomed the birth of 1900. Yet, as the shrill greetings died away, one heard the tramp of infantry through the streets. The Capetown Highlanders—a volunteer battalion—were under arms all that night, as a rising of the Dutch had been anticipated on New Year's Day. May the new year see the end of this cruel strife, and the sun of righteousness arise upon this unhappy land with healing in his wings ! As one sits in the dimly-lit wards while the train tears through the darkness, and nothing breaks



the silence save the groan of a wounded man or the cries of some poor fellow racked with rheumatic fever—at times like these one thinks of many things, past, present and future. An ever-deepening gloom of military disaster seemed to be spreading itself around us—Magersfontein, Stormberg and the latest repulse on the Tugela, a veritable *τρικυμία κακῶν*! Of course, in the long run, we *shall* and *must* win. But what afterwards? Will the vanquished Dutch submit and live in peace and amity with their conquerors, or will they preserve the memory of their dead from generation to generation, and cherish that unspeakable bitterness which they at present feel for England and her people? Verily all these things lie on the knees of the gods!









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